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The Unseen Hand. 149



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THE UNSEEN HAND;

OR,

THE FOUR SCOUTS OF THE WACCAMAW.

BY J. STANLEY HENDERSON,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

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THE UNSEEN HAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

IN the sitting-room of Judge Richard Alston's fine old mansion near the Waccamaw river, on the eastern shore of South Carolina, were seated, one evening in the summer of 1781, the judge and his wife, with their daughter Edith and their son Henry.

Nature smiled around them; they were wealthy and prosperous, blessed with an abundance of the good things of the earth; but the brows of all were dark with gloom, as if the shadow of some coming evil hung over them.

They had reason to feel sad; for tyranny was triumphant, liberty was crushed, and rapine and murder, confiscation and violence, walked through the land untouched, except by a few brave blows that were struck now and then. Judge Alston and his family were strong Whigs, who had early espoused the cause of liberty and independence. They had seen the flames arising from the burning homes of their neighbors, and had seen their friends led away to death or captivity. At any time their own turn might come, and they shuddered, while they feared not, under the sword that was suspended over their heads.

Judge Alston nursed his rheumatism on the sofa, with his wife to keep him company. Edith Alston, a stately and elegant young lady of nineteen, mused over her embroidery at one window. Her brother Harry, a tall and handsome young man of twenty-four, who sat in a rocking-chair at another window, was apparently an invalid. He was bolstered up with pillows; his face was unnaturally pale; his left arm hung in a sling, and a small table, covered with bottles of medicine, stood near him.

"What's that, Edith?" asked Harry Alston, as a grating

noise was heard, seeming to proceed from under the floor of the room.

"I don't know," calmly replied his sister. "Such noises have been so frequent of late, that I have become accustomed to them, and take no notice of them. I hope you are not afraid of ghosts, Harry, for I suppose the house must be haunted."

"Something is the matter with the old building," said Judge Alston. "Those noises have become so very frequent, that they are nuisances to me. They keep me in a continual state of nervousness. If any of my ancestors had died in this house, I should be inclined to believe that their spirits were not at rest."

"From whom did you buy this place, father?" asked Edith.

"It belonged to a Scotchman, who suddenly returned to his own country a short time after he built it, and it remained untenanted until I bought it. It is not a very old place, though we have been in the habit of calling it old."

"There is another strange noise, father. Is that the hooting of an owl?"

"It is too early in the evening for owls to be out," remarked Mrs. Alston.

"Perhaps it is one of the signals of Marion's men? Ah, Harry, you seem to recognize it."

Harry Alston leaned out of the window, and gave a peculiar low whistle, which was answered by another from the bushes. In a few moments three men hastened up to the front door, and entered the house, warmly welcomed by Edith Alston and her mother.

We have said that three men entered the house; but one of them was a mere lad, not over fifteen years of age, although he was a man in spirit and bravery, and had already borne his part nobly in the contest for liberty. The others were Sergeants Macdonald and Stairn, of Marion's corps; the first a red-faced Scotchman, of great size and strength; the second a dark-haired and handsome young man, of about the same age as Henry Alston.

Rough as these men were, in their attire and their general appearance, they could not have received a heartier welcome if

they had been the highest magnates in the land. Mrs. Alston and Edith hastened to open the large mahogany sideboard, and to place on the table decanters and bottles of fine old brandy and wine, with sugar and honey and cakes, to which they helped their rude guests, and kindly pressed them to help themselves.

"You must excuse me, my good friends, for not rising to meet you," said Judge Alston. "My rheumatism will hardly let me leave the sofa now; but I assure you that you are welcome to every thing there is in the house. Would to God that we could welcome more of our brave defenders, and fewer of the rascally red-coats! Margaret, have you nothing more substantial in the way of lunch, that you can set before these fine fellows?"

"Pray don't give yourself any more trouble, madam," said Macdonald. "We have an abundance, judge, and can ask for nothing better. If we could always fall in with such good Whig families as yours, there would be more pleasure mingled with our hard duty."

"You must let us fill your portmanteaus or your bags with something good to eat; for I warrant that you have had enough fare in the swamps and woods."

"Hard enough, to be sure; but God gives us wonderful appetites. None need compassion but our sick and wounded. We have neither bags nor portmanteaus; for we have been scouting around Georgetown, and we took nothing but our arms. Do you know my friends, here, Judge Alston? This is Sergeant Robert Stairn, as pretty a fellow with a broadsword or a rifle as we have in the brigade. But, he seems to be acquainted, judging from the glances that are passing between him and the young lady."

Edith blushed, young Stairn looked confused, and Judge Alston frowned rather severely.

"And this young soldier," continued Macdonald, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, "is a crack shot with a rifle, too. He is Master Billy Gwinn, and I don't doubt that you have heard of him."

"The boy who killed the Tory Captain Lewis, down on the Sandpit road?"

"The same, sir. For that act General Marion presented

him with Lewis's horse and pistols and all his accouterments. We can count Gwinn one of our best men-at-arms, and his rifle is always sure to hit a red-coat, if there is one within sight."

"Bless the brave lad. Pour me a glass of wine, Edith, and let it be a bumper, that I may drink the health of our noble friends, and success to George Washington and the cause of independence."

The toasts were drank with enthusiasm, and the old gentleman rose to his feet as he mentioned the name of Washington.

"This rheumatism is a sad thing, my friends," he said, as he sunk back upon the sofa; "but this may be the last time that I will have a chance to drink the health of the commander of our armies in my own house."

"Why do you say so, judge?"

"The British officers are carrying out the infamous orders of Lord Cornwallis, and are plundering, burning, imprisoning and hanging by the wholesale. I have seen the flames rising from the houses and barns and rice-stacks of my neighbors, and have seen my friends led away in fetters, and I am only waiting my turn."

"You ought not to be down-hearted, sir. *Spero meliora* is my motto. I hope for better things, and believe that the day is not far distant when the British will be driven out of the land, and we will possess it as a free and independent people."

"But, before that day comes, sergeant, there will be a great deal to endure. The British are now on our backs, and are riding us with sharp spurs. I am daily expecting a visit from the namesake of your friend Stairn, Major Stairn, of Georgetown. I know that informations have been lodged against me, and that I have been threatened with punishment for what the British officers call my disloyalty."

"I wish that we might be on hand when you receive that visit; but we are obliged to be careful, and can only strike when good chances are offered to us. When does Mr. Henry Alston expect to join us?"

"To-morrow," replied Harry; "or the next day at furthest. I am only waiting for an answer to a message I sent to Charles."

"There is a lady in the case, I suppose, and the British officers will not let Miss Trapier leave the city. Come, Sergeant Stairn and Billy Gwinn, it is time for us to be off. We have already spent too much time with our kind friends."

Judge Alston pressed the rough soldiers to come again, assuring them that his house would always be open to them, as long as he had a house. A pressure of the hands and an expressive glance passed between Robert Stairn and Edith Alston, and Macdonald and his party left the mansion.

Edith Alston resumed her embroidery, her father again nursed his troublesome limbs, Mrs. Alston removed the decanters and dishes, and Harry sat by the window, looking moodily out at the deepening twilight.

Half an hour passed in silence, which was at last broken by Mrs. Alston.

"You had better put up your work, Edith," said she. "It is too dark now to be trying your eyes over that embroidery. Harry, my son, as you are an invalid, you ought not to sit in the night air."

"I wish I was as well at heart as I am in body, mother," replied the young gentleman. "If I could hear from Charleston, you would soon see how much of an invalid I am. I am impatient to see this farce ended, that I may draw my free sword, and cry hurrah for Washington and independence!"

"Ah, is that your game, my fine young man? I think the hemp is grown that will hang you for your treasonable words and intentions."

This harsh exclamation came from the lips of a British officer, who had stolen silently into the hall, and who stood at the door of the sitting-room, smiling sardonically at the group. He was a large and portly man, with a very red face and a self-important air.

All were astonished at this unexpected appearance, and their astonishment was increased when they saw red-coated soldiers standing in front of the windows.

"What do you mean by this intrusion, Major Stairn?" asked Judge Alston, in angry but dignified tones. "Does your uniform give you license to enter the dwellings of private citizens as you please?"

"Of course it does," replied the officer, with a sneer; "especially when those private citizens are traitors to their king. Loyal subjects would not object to what you call an intrusion, but would welcome the representative of his majesty; it is only the disaffected who dislike the sight of our uniforms."

"I did not object to your visit, Major Stairn, and am willing to welcome you as a gentleman. I only objected to your manner of stealing into my house."

"You ought to be glad, rather, that I have not come to steal you out of it. I have come in kindness, to warn you that I shall be compelled to arrest you, if you persevere in your disloyal course, if you continue to harbor traitors and make your house a refuge for rebels."

"What proofs have you of my disloyalty?"

"Sufficient to hang you, if strict justice should be done. There have been plenty of informations laid against you, and I know that you have harbored traitors this evening. If anything more was needed, the expression that has just been used by your son would be enough to show the disaffection of your family."

"You must not mind what Harry says," said Mrs. Alston.

"He was only joking. He is such an invalid, that he can not leave the house, or get up from his chair without assistance. Do you not see how deathly pale he is?"

"I see it, madam," replied Major Stairn, with another sneer. "It is a pity that such a strong and hearty young man should be so stricken down. It is a pity, too, that his language does not correspond better with his appearance. In fact, he is a very unfortunate young man. But come, madam; you can entertain the rascally rebels with the best you have in your house; have you no refreshments for the humble servants of the king?"

"To be sure I have. I was so startled that I forgot to ask you to partake of some cakes and wine."

Mrs. Alston again opened the sideboard, and set out her decanters and bottles and dishes, taking care to place nothing on the table that bore evidence of recent use. Major Stairn called in two other officers, who helped themselves freely to the dainties sending out a liberal portion to the soldiers.

The major partook plentifully of both brandy and wine, and, the more he drank, the more exhilarated he became, and the higher rose his enthusiasm for the cause of King George.

"Come, Mrs. Alston," he said, handing the old lady a glass of wine; "I have a toast to propose: I hope you have no objection to drinking the health of King George."

"None at all," replied Mrs. Alston. "I am sure that I wish him no harm, poor man."

"And you, young sir; I suppose you are willing to qualify your treasonable expressions, by tossing off a bumper to the success of his majesty's arms."

"Don't ask Harry to drink wine, I beg you," entreated the anxious mother. "His health is very delicate, and his physician has absolutely prohibited all stimulants. I am sure that he wishes no harm to King George's arms or any of his limbs."

"It is a pity that he is such an invalid. He is a very unfortunate young man. Now, my fair young lady, brightest of all the flowers that bloom on the banks of the Waccamaw, I hope you will gratify me by drinking confusion to rebels."

"A profusion of rebels?" answered Edith, with a sly smile. "Certainly, if you wish me to."

"You have slightly mistaken me. I did not know that you were so hard of hearing. Will you drink the health of your very humble servant, Major Alexander Stairn?"

"With all my heart, and I hope that you may be led in the way of pleasantness and the path of peace."

"A very pious and bucolic wish; but one that will hardly suit a martial career. As you are so well inclined toward me, I must have a kiss from your sweet lips, to prove your sincerity."

Edith started in indignation; but Major Stairn had thrown his strong arm around her waist, and she screamed as his red face approached her pure cheeks.

The next instant Harry Alston sprung from his chair, seized the officer by the collar, and hurled him out into the middle of the room, where he fell sprawling on the floor.

"I will teach you to insult my sister, you cowardly scoundrel!" exclaimed the young gentleman, as he stepped toward the prostrate officer, with flashing eyes and uplifted arm."

"Seize him!" roared Major Stairn, as he rose from the floor. "Seize the young rebel, and bind him! I have found him out now, and he shall not escape justice."

The two young officers threw themselves upon Harry Alston, and, assisted by the soldiers who rushed into the room, they soon bound him securely, in spite of his struggles.

CHAPTER II

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE.

"So, Madam Alston," said Major Stairn, as he seated himself and wiped his forehead, "this is your interesting invalid! Judging from the force he just now exerted, he must be too weak to be moved; but I shall be obliged to take him to Georgetown. I will be very tender with him, and will permit him to ride behind one of my dragoons, with his feet tied under the horse's belly, to keep him from falling, and with nice bracelets upon his wrists, to keep him from hurting himself. It is plain that exercise is good for him; for a healthy color glows through all the paint or flour you have daubed on his cheeks. Seriously, madam, I believe that he is not very ill, and that his life is not in danger, except from some accident that may happen to his neck."

"Enjoy your triumph," coldly replied Harry. "It well becomes an insulter of women to boast of his victory over a defenseless man."

"I am not boasting of my victory, young sir. You handled me pretty roughly, and I was the vanquished party until my reinforcements arrived. It is a pleasure to me to know that I am a worker of miracles, and that I can restore invalids to health and strength. Who knows but I might drive away your father's rheumatism? What I do boast of is the success of the little stratagem by which I induced you to exert yourself and jump out of the chair from which it was impossible for you to rise."

"It was a mean trick, and unworthy of an officer and gentleman."

"That may be your opinion; but you must admit that it succeeded. Stratagems play an important part in the game of war, and are always justifiable. I was sure that you were only shamming, but I am a just man, and I never like to proceed to harsh measures until I have plenty of proof. You may rejoice that the farce is now ended, and that you will be able to shout for Washington and independence on the scaffold."

"For God's sake, do not say that you mean to hang my son!" exclaimed Mrs. Alston. "Do not take him from me, I beg you! His father is helpless, and he is my only protector."

"He is too much of an invalid to protect you, madam. If you can not rely upon your rebel friends, you will have to do without protection. Come, Captain Frodham; we must be off with our prisoner."

As the major ceased speaking, a grating noise was heard, under the floor of the room. In a few moments it was heard again, seeming to proceed from the wall.

"What is that?" asked the officer, turning a little pale.

"The ghost," calmly replied Edith. "It visits us very frequently."

"A ghost!" exclaimed Major Stairn, forcing a laugh. "That is one luxury too many, even for such a fine mansion as this. I must really leave you; for I am not fond of the companionship of ghosts. If you keep a ghost on the premises, Mrs. Alston, it will not be necessary for you to have any other protector."

As no one took any notice of the officer's sorry attempt at wit, he rose from his chair, and directed his soldiers to lead out their prisoner.

In order to do so, they were obliged to pass through the hall, and through the folding front door, only half of which was open. It was now night, and quite dark, and there was no light in the hall.

Harry Alston was marched forth, preceded by two soldiers, and followed by two more, after whom came Major Stairn and his officers. Judge Alston watched this procession with moody gaze, his wife was bathed in tears and wringing her hands, and Edith's defiant glance told what she would do, if she could, to the persecutors of her family.

The two soldiers who were in the advance led the way through the hall to the door; when, just as they were passing out, the foremost uttered a yell and a curse, and fell forward on the steps. The second stepped forward to assist him; but he, also, uttered a yell and a curse, and fell forward by the side of his comrade.

"What does this mean? What sort of deviltry is here?" exclaimed Major Stairn, as he witnessed the fall of his soldiers. "Bring some lights, and let us see what is the matter."

He took a candle from the sitting-room, and rushed out to the front door, where he found the two men lying on the steps, moaning and bathed in blood. A closer examination showed that their legs were nearly cut off, and that one of them was fast bleeding to death.

They were brought into the hall, where their wounds were dressed as well as possible by Captain Fordham, while the major examined the premises, in order to discover how and by whom the wounds had been inflicted.

A large pool of blood, just inside of the door, showed the place where the blows, if any, had been dealt; but, further than this, there was nothing to declare how the mysterious cutting had occurred. No person was found lurking about the premises, and there was no evidence that any one had been there. One of the wounded men, however, declared that he had seen, as he stepped forward to assist his comrade, the blade of a broadsword shining above the floor, and that it seemed to be stretched horizontally, about six inches above the boards. His statement was received with general incredulity; but he adhered to it, under the closest questioning, and his companion said that he had felt, when he was hurt, as if he was struck by a sword. These declarations, and the evident nature of the wounds, prepared Major Stairn to believe that there was something supernatural in the occurrence.

"This is exceedingly strange," he said, as he again took a seat in the sitting-room, and drank a glass of brandy to steady his nerves. "Are you in league with the devil, Judge Alston, or have the rebels a fortress in your house, as well as a hiding-place? I never saw or heard of a more singular transaction."

"It must be the ghost, Major Stairn," said Elith, with a smile. "I can think of no other way of accounting for it. You laughed at our ghost, and he has revenged himself upon you for treating him so slightly."

"I never before heard of a ghost of a broadsword, that could cut and slash as if it was wielded by a human arm. There was mortal steel in the weapon that wounded my poor fellows, and I would give fifty pounds to know whose hand wielded it or directed it."

"You surely can not suppose that we had any thing to do with the occurrence," said Judge Alston. "We were all here in the room, as you well know. Our negroes are all at their quarters, and there is no one else in or about the house, except yourself and your officers and men."

"Perhaps you believe in the ghost theory."

"I am not a believer in ghosts, and I see no way of accounting for it. I know that we have been much annoyed lately by strange noises about the house, and that we do not know what has caused them."

"It is very mysterious, no doubt; but I am inclined to think that some of you know more about the matter than you pretend to. You seem to live in the house very contentedly notwithstanding the ghosts. For my part, I have no fondness for such tricks, and I give warning to every one in or about this house, visible or invisible, that they must not be repeated, or somebody will suffer for it. I know of one sure way to drive ghosts out of a house."

When Major Stairn gave this warning, he raised his voice, as if he meant to be heard by those who were out of his sight, as well as by those who were in the room. If he addressed himself to the invisibles, he was heard and answered; for a low and mocking laugh followed his words, sounding as if it proceeded from the wall near the door.

The major was so startled, that he jumped from his chair, and his red face became ghastly pale. It was evident that he was a believer in ghosts; but he tried to conceal his confusion by a fit of passion.

"There is some infernal treachery and devilry going on here," he exclaimed. "I believe that you and your family are responsible for it, Judge Alston, and I will hold you

responsible for it, if it is not stopped. Captain Frodham, are those wounded men ready to be moved?"

"One of them is not badly off; but the other is really unfit to be moved," replied his subordinate.

"Put them both on horses immediately, or make a litter. They must be moved in some way; for I will not stay another minute in a house where there are such infernal goings on."

In a short time Frodham announced that all was ready for departure, and the major set out with his prisoner, giving Judge Alston a parting broadside before he went.

"I wish you to see to it, sir," he said, "that this matter is investigated. If you do not attend to it, I will return, as soon as I see this young man safe in Georgetown, and will investigate it myself and in my own way."

As there was a light in the hall, Major Stairn passed out without accident; but it might have been noticed that he stepped pretty high as he went over the door-sill. In a few moments he was mounted, with his prisoner, and the clattering of sabers and the rattling of spurs announced that the party of dragoons was riding down the avenue.

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOST SPEAKS PLAINLY.

THERE was lamentation in the Alston family after Harry had been dragged off as a prisoner. Until he was really gone, his stricken relatives had not fully realized the fact that he was to be taken from them; but then they felt, in its full force, the agony of separation. Worse, still; they felt the meaning of the threats that Major Stairn had made, and the probability that their son and brother would be consigned to a long captivity, if not to an ignominious death. It was true that no open act of hostility toward the British government could be proved against him; but it was evident, from the words which Major Stairn had overheard, that he intended joining the Continental army, and the deception that he had

practiced, by pretending to be a helpless invalid, would tell strongly against him. These thoughts ran quickly through the minds of his family, as the horses' hoofs sounded on the pebbly avenue, and produced feelings of the greatest sadness and despondency.

"I do wish," said the judge, "that Harry had joined General Marion when he first intended to do so. It would have been no worse for us, and much better for him. If he had gone yesterday, or this evening with Macdonald, we would have been spared this infliction. But he was determined to procrastinate."

"He is in love, father, and is excusable," answered Edith. "The British keep Clara Trapier a prisoner in Charleston, and Harry has been so anxious to hear from her, that it has made him heart-sick. You know that he intended leaving us to-morrow, whether he received an answer to his message or not."

"To-morrow never comes. The mischief is done now."

"What can they do to him? He has committed no wrong."

"You forget, Edith, that I had accepted a British protection, and I suppose that Harry, as a member of my family, was included in it. I ought not to have done so; but the promises were so fair, and I thought that I might remain neutral in act, if not in thought. I fear for Harry the fate that so many of our gallant youths have met."

"Let us hope for the best, dear father. I will go to Georgetown, and—"

"What are you saying, child? Hark! Is not that a bugle?"

"Yes, sir. I believe it is one of Marion's bugles. It is—I know the sound."

"Pray God that they will be in time to save your brother!"

"They will, father. The dragoons have hardly got out into the road. Hear how they scurper! Marion's men are driving them toward Georgetown, and will surely rescue Harry."

In fact, the galloping of the flying dragoons, the shouts of their pursuers, the blowing of bugles, and the reports of fire-arms could plainly be heard from the windows of the old

house. In a short time these sounds had all died away, and all was quiet again, when the moon rose, bright and calm, above the tree-tops.

"That was just like Marion," said Judge Alston. "A night surprise, with a quick rush, is his strong point in fighting. He has doubtless cut the red-coats to pieces and scattered them. He must soon be here, if he has gained a victory, and I am sure that he has."

Long and eagerly the anxious family waited and listened, hoping to gain tidings of the defeat of the British and the rescue of their son and brother; but the same silence reigned around, and nothing was to be seen or heard approaching the house.

"I am afraid that the attack has miscarried," said Judge Alston. "If it has not failed, the patriots mean to chase the British clear to Georgetown, and we shall not see them here to-night. But Harry should have returned to us, it seems to me, if he had been set free."

At last the steps of horses were heard, coming up the avenue. Edith would have hastened out to welcome the visitors, supposing them to be her brother and some of Marion's men; but she was restrained by her father.

"Wait until we see who they are," he said. "It is possible that they may not be our friends. I am afraid that there is more trouble in store for us."

The result proved that the judge had given good advice; for their countenances fell as they recognized the harsh voice of Major Stairn at the door, amid the tramping of the horses of his dragoons. The next moment he entered the house, accompanied by an officer and two men.

"This is another unexpected visit, Major Stairn," said Judge Alston. "What has given us the honor of receiving you here again to-night? We thought that you had gone to Georgetown."

"It is an honor, to be sure, to receive one of his majesty's officers; but you will not think so when I am done with you. I have come back on special business, which concerns you rather particularly."

"What can it be? We heard shots and shouts and a strange disturbance in the road, shortly after you left us, an

we thought it possible that you had been attacked. I presume that you beat off your enemy easily enough."

"I want none of your presumptions. We had hardly turned into the road, when we heard bugles on our flank and in our rear, and a squadron of horse, as we supposed, came dashing through the woods. I tried to form my men; but the dogs were struck with a panic, thinking that Marion and all his ragged rogues were upon them, and they scattered and ran like sheep. After they had gone a mile or so, I succeeded in halting a few of them, and they discovered that there was no enemy in pursuit. Captain Frodham, who was in the rear, informed me that he had seen but one man following us, mounted on a black horse. At last I collected my men together, sent my wounded under a guard to Georgetown, and returned here to investigate the matter."

"Did my son escape?" eagerly inquired Mrs. Alston.

"That question is of the first importance to you, I suppose. I can only inform you that we found, on our return, the dragoon who had carried him, lying dead by the side of the road, with his head split open as if with a broadsword, and that the prisoner and the horse were missing. I will say, if it will be any consolation to you, that I suppose the young rebel escaped; though I have no doubt that you know more about the matter than I do."

"Do you pretend to say," asked Judge Alston, "that we had any thing to do with your scare? I mean, do you suppose that we were in any way connected with the attack which was made upon you, as you tell us, by one man?"

"I will tell you what I do say, Judge Alston. I say that there have been strange goings-on at this house, and that this trick, or whatever it may be called, must be connected with the cutting of my soldiers, which happened right in your door."

"Your suspicions are all wrong and very unjust, Major Stain. I assure you, upon the word of a gentleman, that I know nothing more about either transaction than you do, and I can see no reason why I should not give the same assurance for my wife and daughter."

"I assure you that I know nothing about it," said Edith. "I can only suppose that the ghost has been at his pranks again."

"You have all plenty of assurance, no doubt; but the word of a rebel is not worth much in these times. I am convinced that this house is a hiding-place for traitors, and that they are responsible for these pranks, as you call them. If a ghost has done the mischief, it is a rebel ghost, and must be treated as such. Ghost or no ghost, I shall so act that this house shall not be used for such purposes any more."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Judge Alston.

"I mean to burn this house to the ground, sir."

"Burn the house!" exclaimed the judge and his wife, in utter consternation.

"Yes, burn the house! That is what I mean to do, and I advise you to hurry and get out such articles of clothing as you may need; for the torch will be applied in exactly fifteen minutes."

Mrs. Alston, perceiving that the officer was in earnest, hastened to gather together such things as she could, while her husband sat in speechless astonishment.

"Does your authority allow you to go so far, Major Stairn?" asked Edith.

"My authority is my own affair, and my acts are only to be criticised by my superiors. I will say to you, however, that my authority has no limits where the enemies of the king are concerned."

Edith offered no further protest, and Major Stairn sat, with his watch in his hand, awaiting the expiration of the time that he had named.

"The fifteen minutes are up," he soon said. "Come, you must bundle out of here, and there is not a word more to be said about it. Dickson, do you and Charles light your torches at this candle, and commence where you please. We will soon rout out the ghosts."

The two soldiers advanced to the candle with their torches. Mrs. Alston covered her face with her hands, the judge groaned audibly, and Edith again looked defiance and determination.

"Hold!" exclaimed a hollow, sepulchral voice, which seemed to come from behind a portrait that hung on the wall.

Major Stairn staggered back and turned pale; the soldiers dropped their unlighted torches; Judge Alston almost rose

to his feet; Edith and her mother uttered slight screams; and all stared wildly at the picture on the wall, as if expecting it to step down from its place.

It did not move; but again the voice was heard, as if from the lips of the portrait, uttering these words plainly:

"Alexander Stairn, beware what you do! If you fire this house, at the same moment the flame will rise from your own hall at Inloch! Your sister remembers her wrongs, and is ready to avenge them!"

If a thunderbolt had fallen in the room, Major Stairn could not have been seized with greater consternation. His face turned to the hue of ashes, his whole frame trembled violently, and he sunk into a chair, covering his face with his hands, as if to shut from view some fearful specter. The dragoons retreated from the hall, and not a word was spoken in the room, until the major recovered his breath, if not his presence of mind.

"Did you hear that voice?" he asked, in a hoarse and frightened tone, so low that it was almost a whisper.

No one answered, and he looked wildly about, shuddering as his eyes fell on the picture.

"It is a strange and wonderful thing," he continued, as if speaking to himself. "My sister is dead, and there can be no one here who knows any thing about her. Is it possible that her spirit can act out a vengeance? There must be reality in this warning. Judge Alston," he said, in a louder tone, "whose portrait is that opposite to me on the wall?"

"I believe it is the likeness of the man who built this house, and from whose agent I bought it."

"What was his name?"

"He was a Scotchman, named Ronald Mardison."

"My sister's husband! He, too, is dead. This is wonderful. Judge Alston, I will spare your house, if you will remove that portrait."

"I will, sir, as soon as you leave. I have no desire to keep it."

"I will leave in the morning. I will leave this house to-night, for I could not sleep in it. I give you notice that I must take your daughter to Georgetown when I go, as a hostage for the behavior of her family. When your son is

ready to deliver himself up, she will be released not before."

"Then I will remain a prisoner until the colonies are free," said Edith. "Harry knows that I would willingly part with my liberty to save his life, or even to keep him firm in the good cause."

"Are you so hot a rebel? We will see if we can not tame you. You need not attempt to escape to-night, although I shall not remain in the house; for I can tell you that it will be well guarded."

With these words Major Stairn relieved the family of his presence. After placing sentinels around the building, he slept on the ground, in preference to passing a night under the roof of the haunted house.

As soon as he was gone, Judge Alston requested Edith to remove the portrait of Ronald Murdison, and she took it to her own room.

"You had better go to bed now, Edith," said her father, when she returned. "It is very late, and you need rest. If you are obliged to go to Georgetown, you will not long be there alone; for I will shut up this house, and remove to Georgetown with your mother."

"I am not at all afraid, father. The British will not kill me, and I am sure that they can not frighten me. As I will have the portrait in my room, I ought to have a visit from the ghost to-night. Good-night, and may your dreams be as pleasant as mine will be."

CHAPTER IV.

FOUR AGAINST TEN.

ON a small island in the midst of a large swamp, through which a sluggish creek wound its way to the Waccamaw, four persons were seated around the embers of a fire.

These four persons—for they could not all have been called men—were Sergeant Macdonald, Robert Stairn, the boy Gwinn, and another, who deserves a brief description.

This person was a young gentleman about thirty years old, although he evidently desired to look younger than he was. In form he was a little over the medium height, of full figure, and inclined to be portly. His hands and feet were small, and the former were covered with buckskin gloves. His face was full, ruddy, and quite handsome, his eyes were of a bright blue, and his brown hair was worn long and curling. In dress he made some pretensions to elegance — pretensions which were poorly carried out by his apparel. His faded green coat, with its tarnished gold lace, spoke of better days that were past, his fine buff breeches showed many a darn and stain; and his high polished leather boots, with the tops ornamented with green and gold, were sadly the worse for wear. On his head he wore a broad-brimmed hat, looped up at the side, and adorned with a blue feather. At his right hand lay a sword with an ornamented hilt, and a silver-mounted hunting-rifle. At his left sat a large and splendid stag-hound.

It was night, and the island and the surrounding swamp were silent, except from the croaking of frogs and the noises of myriads of night-birds and insects. It was night; but the rays of the moon, which was nearly at its full, strayed through the tops of the tall trees, flecking the green carpet with patches of light and shadow.

"For my part," said the boy Gwinn, as if resuming a conversation that had been broken off, "I shall be glad to see the fighting go on, if General Marion will praise me as he has done."

"For my part," said Stairn, "I hardly know whether or not the close of the war will leave me any better off than the beginning found me. I am despondent enough, but shall always be ready to give my life for the good cause."

"And for my part," said Macdonald, "it will please me well to keep my stout sword unsheathed, so long as there is a chance to kill the British and Tories, and to free America. After my father was defeated by the patriots, at Morris Creek Bridge, in North Carolina, I vowed that I would fight for independence as long as any other man would, and I mean to keep my word. Let us hear what the cavalier has to say about it."

The gentleman in the green coat stretched his legs, lifted his hat from his brows, and tossed his head with a haughty air.

"I do not see that it is a matter of much moment to me," he said. "Here am I, Herbert Darrell, a gentleman born and bred, of good birth and high connections, and what am I? As poor as a church mouse, ragged and forlorn, without a cent in my pocket or a decent coat on my back, occupying the humble position of a private in a company of root-eating, water-bibbing swamp-foxes."

"You know that you might have had a higher position, if you had chosen to accept it," suggested Macdonald.

"True enough; but what was that to the position I was born to? I was educated as a rich man, and hoped to be rich; but all my prospects melted away like the morning vapor. I ought to be heir to the great Darlington estate, in the home country, and so I would have been, had not nature thrust in half a dozen healthy cousins between me and the property."

"But the cause, my bold cavalier," said Macdonald. "How like you our cause?"

"Well enough. I take to rebellion very kindly, for one of my name. The Darrells and the Darlingtons have always been loyal to their king; in fact, they prided themselves on their loyalty. I should have been as loyal as any of them, no doubt, if I had succeeded to the Darlington estate and title; but my six cousins drove that sentiment out of my head. I was a poverty-stricken cast-off, and it suited me to fight for liberty. If wealth and titles are denied me, I can at least hope to gain freedom and independence."

"Bravo, cavalier! You shall be an American sovereign, please God, and that will one day be the proudest title that a man can wear."

"There will be so many to wear it, that it will become common, I am afraid. But away with melancholy, comrades; Let me troll you a little ditty that I used to sing in brighter days."

"It would hardly suit this dark night. We had better seek our grassy couches; for some of us are weary, I know. Let us have the song for a reveille in the morning."

"So let it be. Go to sleep, my gentle lambs, and Stuart and I will watch over you; for we love the moonlight, and we are not drowsy."

Macdonald, Stairn and Gwinn wrapped themselves in their blankets, or in the rags which served them for blankets, and laid down under the trees. Herbert Darrell took his rifle, and commenced to walk slowly about the little island, with his stag-hound as a companion.

"You must watch with me, Stuart," said he. "Do you take one side of the island, and I will take the other, and we will meet as we walk our rounds."

The noble animal seemed to understand what was said; for he looked up in his master's face with an air of intelligence, and quietly walked across the island.

During several hours the man and the dog paced their rounds, meeting every now and then, and exchanging greetings after their own fashion; but nothing occurred to break the heavy silence that reigned on the island and through the swamp.

The whippowills had commenced their last song before morning, from which Darrell knew that it lacked an hour to daybreak, when a low growl from the dog attracted his attention, followed by the cry of an owl.

"Some one coming," he muttered. "Stuart never makes a mistake. It must be a friend, too; for it strikes me that owl hooted like one of the human kind."

Darrell repeated the cry of the owl, and was answered by a peculiar whistle, which he also repeated. He then awakened his friends, and stationed himself by the side of the dog, who seemed ready to spring upon an approaching foe.

In a few moments the splashing of a horse's feet was heard, coming through the swamp, and a horseman was seen, in the last rays of the moonlight, winding along the difficult path that led to the island.

"David Darfour!" exclaimed the four scouts together, as the rider came up and dismounted in front of them.

The new-comer was an old man, somewhat bent by years or infirmities, and with hair as white as snow, although his fresh and fair countenance did not accord with these appearances of great age. His countenance was severe and melan-

choly, and his eyes were piercing and of great brilliancy. He was dressed in black velvet coat and breeches, and wore a slouched hat, which was pulled down over his brows.

"Good-morning, old friend," said Darrell. "We are glad to have our rest broken by such an arrival. What has brought you here at this early hour?"

"Business," briefly replied the old gentleman, as he hitched his horse, a powerful black animal, to a swinging limb.

"I hope your business is connected with the good cause. Have you found a nest of Tories for us to break up, or have you come to warn us to expect an attack from the British?"

"Four of you," said the old man, meditatively, as he scanned the features of the four scouts. "Four against ten—that is pretty heavy odds."

"Never mind the odds!" exclaimed Macdonald. "Show us where to touch the ten, and we will give a good account of them. Four against ten is better than two against five, and that is just the odds that pleases Macdonald."

"But one of you is a mere boy. Are there no more men within reach?"

"That boy, friend Darfour, is Billy Gwinn."

"I have heard of him. He is a good shot, but is hardly stout enough to handle a broadsword among British dragoons. But you must try it, if you are willing, and there is no time to lose. This morning—not at an early hour, as I think—a party of British will leave Judge Alston's house, under the command of Major Stairn. The party will number ten, counting the two officers. They will have with them Edith Alston, whom they are to take as a prisoner, to Georgetown."

"Edith Alston a prisoner!" exclaimed young Stairn. "What does this mean?"

"Henry Alston was arrested by them last evening; but he escaped during the night, and Major Stairn has now taken Edith, declaring that she shall be detained until her brother shall see fit to give himself up."

"This means more than you say, Mr. Darfour. There is some infernal scheme against Edith on foot, and it is likely that that rascally Tory, Chester Dingley, is concerned in it."

"Perhaps so. I only know what I have told you. Are you willing to try to rescue her?"

"Willing! Nothing could keep me from it. I would make the attempt alone, if I had no one to assist me. But I know that I can count on my friends, here."

"Of course you can, my boy," said Darrell; "especially as your friends could not draw their blades for a fairer or sweeter lady."

"You may count on me," said Macdonald. "If there were fifty British, they should feel the edge of my claymore."

"I think there are about six of you now," said Darfour, with a smile. "I would like to accompany you myself; but I am old, and might be in the way. If you will go to the bridge on the Sandpit road, I think you can do the work there. You should conceal yourselves and wait for the party, and you know the rest. I must bid you good-morning, as I have urgent business that calls me away."

The old gentleman mounted his horse and rode away, leaving the scouts in a state of considerable excitement over the news that he had brought. They were not too much excited, however, to make a hearty meal off of such poor provisions as they had. They then mounted their horses, and rode across the swamp, and through forest-paths toward the bridge on the Sandpit road.

"David Darfour is a strange man," said Darrell, when they were out of the swamp and fairly on their way. "He is a fine-looking man, too, for his age, and I have no doubt that he is of good birth."

"He is a Scotchman," answered Macdonald, as if that settled the question of birth. "He is a good friend to the cause, and has helped us greatly on several occasions. When we were recruiting up on Pedee, we had no money, and we could get no recruits, because of the scarcity of cash. We were in a sad strait, and it was one of the darkest hours of the cause. Who should come up, then, but this old gentleman, with a big bag-full of gold, which he distributed among the officers, telling them to use it to beat the British. He has often given us valuable information, and I am sure that Lord Rawdon, if he knew what David Darfour has done for us, would have hung him long ago. But he comes and goes as he pleases, and the British have never molested him."

"He has a melancholy look, like our young friend Stairn, and the same brilliant dark eyes. They are enough alike to be relatives. But, I suppose it is more probable that Robert is in some way related to Major Stairn, whom we are going to fight. I always thought you were of good blood, my boy."

"It is not likely I am of Major Stairn's blood, although I happen to bear his name," replied Robert. "You need not suppose I am of high birth, Darrell. My mother is poor enough, and I am her only reliance."

"Poverty is no proof of low birth. Who is poorer than I am?—and I would be Viscount Darlington, if it was not for my uncle's six children."

"This is no time to be talking about birth. There is death in the air to-day. Let us ride faster; for it would go hard with me to miss striking a blow at those dragoons this morning."

It was after eight o'clock when the scouts reached the bridge. Seeing no one in the road, they examined it, to make sure that the dragoons had not passed, and then concealed themselves in the woods, to await the arrival of the party.

They had waited more than an hour, and were growing impatient, when a low growl from Darrell's dog told them that some one was approaching.

Robert Stairn hastened out to reconnoiter and soon returned, reporting that the dragoons were coming down the road.

The four friends mounted, and entered the road just as the lead of the party came in sight. They fired a volley, and instantly charged upon the red-coats. They had chosen not to attack in the rear or on the flank, notwithstanding the disparity of numbers; but charged on the front, from the near side of the bridge, wishing to give their enemy no opportunity to escape.

The charge was something terrible. In the advance rode Macdonald, mounted on his fine blooded horse Selim, who easily distanced the horses of his friends. In a few moments he was in the midst of the dragoons, cutting and slashing like a madman. Next to him came Robert Stairn, his face in a glow, his eyes flashing fire, and his saber whirling in the air.

Darrell was hardly a neck behind his friend Stairn, riding like a knight of the olden time, erect in his saddle, with his long hair floating behind him, and his straight sword pointed forward like a lance. Directly after these two was young Gwinn, spurring his horse furiously, and cocking one of the pistols that Marion had given him.

The British were surprised and thrown into disorder by the volley and the sudden charge. They soon recovered from their panic; but it was too late, for half their number had fallen, and the victory already belonged to the patriots. One of them, however, knocked Gwinn's sword from his hand, and would have split the boy's skull with his saber, had not the stag-hound leaped up and seized him by the thigh. The next moment Darrell's sharp sword went through the soldier's neck. The rest took to flight, pursued by the exultant patriots.

Major Stairn, at the first onset, had called upon his men to charge, and had dashed through his foes, escaping with a bullet in his arm. Looking around, and perceiving that he was not followed, but that his dragoons were flying to the right and left, he put spurs to his horse, and galloped over the bridge toward Georgetown. He was soon pursued by Macdonald, and his safety was due to the speed of his horse; for his pursuer did not turn back until he was under the guns of the fort at Georgetown.

Young Stairn, with Darrell and Gwinn, remained at the scene of their victory, and anxiously looked for Edith Alston; but, to their great surprise and disappointment, she was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER V.

CHESTER DINGLEY, THE TORY.

It was by no means a pleasant prospect that was before Edith Alston when she retired to her room after Major Stairn had left the house.

To be taken from her home and carried to Georgetown as a prisoner could not be otherwise than annoying to her, although she did not believe that any personal harm was intended her. Still there would be many inconveniences and annoyances to which she would be obliged to submit, and she was inclined to fear that Major Stairn might have some ulterior motive in taking possession of her, which would render her position worse than unpleasant.

She was a stout-hearted young lady, however, with great confidence in her own resources. She found herself singing gayly as she entered her room; for she was sustained by some undefinable hope, which persuaded her that she would come out of her trials triumphantly.

"I do wish," she thought, as she set her candle on the table, and looked up at the portrait of Ronald Murdison, "that the ghost would pay me a visit to-night. It knows so much, that it might show me a way out of my difficulties. I am sure that I would not be afraid of it. Ah me! I wonder where poor Robbie Stairn is to-night. Sleeping in some wild morass, I suppose, if he is not riding hard to surprise some Tory camp. If he knew that I was to be taken to Georgetown in the morning, I think I would be likely to meet him on the way."

After the light was out, and she felt the weight of the darkness, she became sad and troubled, and was not so anxious to receive a ghostly visitation.

She shuddered when she again looked at the place where she had hung the picture; for a mellow light suddenly appeared on its face, as if a candle was held behind the canvas. She knew that there could not be any candle there, as she had

hung the portrait flat against the wall, and the strange appearance filled her with awe and wonder.

Her amazement increased when she imagined the lips of the picture moved, and a voice issued from it, addressing her in the same low and hollow tones that had produced such an effect in the sitting-room.

"Fear not," said the voice. "There are friends who watch over you, and all will be well."

"Who and what are you?" asked Edith, as her courage returned to her.

"A friend to you and to those whom you love," replied the voice. "You shall not be carried to Georgetown, unless you wish to go there."

"I am sure that I have no desire to go to Georgetown. How will it be prevented?"

"You will find friends on the way. I can say no more. Forget not to pray, and rest tranquilly."

The light vanished from the face of the portrait, and Edith again found herself in silence and in darkness. She had her wish; she had received a visit from the ghost, and it had spoken to her words of encouragement and hope. She was not superstitious, but she might be pardoned for believing in such a friendly and well-disposed ghost.

She did not forget to pray, and then she slept as tranquilly, as if she had not been surrounded by troubles and perils.

In the morning she gave her parents an account of the visit from the ghost, but said nothing about it to Major Stairn, although he was anxious to know whether she or any other member of the family had been disturbed.

As soon as the British officer had finished his breakfast, and his men and horses had been fed, he caused his party to saddle up, and informed Edith that he was ready to proceed to Georgetown. The young lady had already received from her parents the assurance that they would shortly follow her to Georgetown; and they had also promised her that Mrs. Stairn, the mother of Robert, a poor but most worthy widow, should be invited to occupy the mansion and take charge of it during their absence.

She obeyed the summons, therefore, with an alacrity that

surprised Major Stairn, and the party soon left the house, and went down the Sandpit road.

Edith was buoyed up by the hopes that had been held out to her by her mysterious visitor, and was continually looking, at every turn of the road, for the deliverance that she confidently expected. Her heart jumped, therefore, when she caught sight of some men and horses, standing at a point where a wagon-track went from the main road in the direction of the sea-coast.

The same persons were perceived by Major Stairn and his party, and were at first objects of suspicion to them. Carabines and pistols were examined, and sabers were loosened in their scabbards. Suspicion vanished, however, as they advanced, and Major Stairn rode forward and greeted the strangers.

They proved to be a white man and two negroes. Major Stairn was evidently on good terms with the white man, and Edith Alston knew him well, although the acquaintance had not been a pleasant one.

Chester Dingley was a stout, pompous, red-faced man, who was reputed to be wealthy, and who was known to be a Tory. He was a widower, without children, and it was asserted that harsh treatment had been the cause of the death of his wife. He had upheld the government of King George since the beginning of the war, and had acted very oppressively toward those of his neighbors who were known or suspected as entertaining Whig principles. He had long entertained a strong admiration for Edith Alston, and had sought to pay his addresses with the view of marrying her; but she had so plainly shown her disinclination to him, that he had not pressed his suit, and she had hardly seen him since the events of the war had placed her rather in opposition to him.

It was any thing but a good omen, Edith thought, to see this man waiting for the escort that was taking her to Georgetown, and to see him greeted so cordially by Major Stairn, who dismounted from his horse, and walked aside into the forest with Dingley.

They went in silence until they were out of sight of the road, when they stopped under a large tree.

"As I meet you here, I presume that you received my message," said Major Stairn.

"Oh, yes," replied Dingley. "I was not expecting to hear from you in that way so soon, and consequently was not as well prepared to receive the young lady as I wished to be; but I am happy to see her, Major Stairn—very happy to see her."

"I would not have taken her so soon, if it had not been that her brother escaped from me, and some of my men were wounded, very mysteriously, right at Judge Alston's door. I was so angry that I came near burning the house."

"And were prevented by a ghost, I understand."

"Was my messenger so talkative? There is something strange about the house, I admit; but I hope that I am too good a soldier to be frightened from my duty by any thing unsubstantial. I thought, Mr. Dingley, that I could not be too soon in bringing you such a prize. I hope you are prepared to fulfill your part of the contract."

"Certainly, major. Here is the money in good English gold. I am a loyal subject of his majesty, God bless him! and never carry any money that does not bear his gracious stamp. None of your Continental *proc* for me, major. Chester Dingley won't touch the stuff."

"That is all very well, Mr. Dingley; but I am in haste, and want to finish this business. I must get back to Georgetown as soon as possible. Let us count the money."

The Tory produced a leather bag, opened it, and poured out a pile of gold upon the grass. Major Stairn sat down by the side of the glittering heap, and counted it very deliberately, examining the pieces carefully, and weighing some of them on his fingers. His proceedings were not at all in accordance with his declaration that he was in a hurry to get to Georgetown.

"It is easy to see that you are a Scotchman, major," said the Tory, as a coin was returned to him that was supposed to be deficient in weight. "You have a keen eye and scent for the yellow gold."

"I want but my rights, Mr. Dingley. We poor officers of his majesty receive but scanty pay, and mine is hardly sufficient to support me decently."

"You have a large estate in Scotland, I understand."

"Some miserable, barren acres. It costs me all that I can get to keep up the estate. The amount is correct, I believe, Mr. Dingley, except that crown piece, and I will let it pass, if you have no other with you to replace it. I will now deliver the girl to you, and will go my way."

"How shall I get her home, major, and how shall I keep her there?"

"That is your affair, my dear sir. I have performed my contract, and the matter rests with you. I do not see why you should find any difficulty in managing the girl to suit yourself."

"The rebel swamp-rats are getting to be more numerous and bolder than they have been. Her brother may be among them, or some lover, and they may find out what has become of her."

"If you are afraid of the rebels, you had better take her to Georgetown. But, I should think you could manage matters better in the country for a while."

"I am afraid that I will have difficulty in getting her to my house."

"There may be a little difficulty; but that is nothing. I will see to it that she goes with you."

Major Starn, who had secured the bag of gold upon his person, led the way back to the road, when he mounted his horse, and turned to Edith Alston.

"You will not need my escort, any longer, Miss Alston," said he. "I shall not take you any further toward Georgetown, but will place you in charge of my friend, Mr. Dingley, a good and loyal subject of his majesty, who tenders you the hospitalities of his home for a while."

"What does this mean, sir?" indignantly asked Edith, a suspicion of the part that Major Starn was playing flashing upon her instantly. "You told my parents that you meant to take me to Georgetown, and they will expect to find me there. I have nothing to do with Mr. Dingley, and I do not wish to go to his house. In fact, there is no other house to which I would not prefer to go, and no other man in whose power I would not prefer to place myself."

"That is quite uncomplimentary to my friend Dingley, who

is a very estimable gentleman, as well as a friend to the cause of King George. If I choose to place you in his custody, I do not see what you can do but submit."

"I will not submit," replied Edith. "There is some foul plot here, in which you, as an officer and a gentleman, ought not to bear a part. I demand that you take me to Georgetown, or return me to my parents. If you try to use your position to do me an injury, Major Stairn, you will be sorry for it." •

"I am accustomed to hearing threats from young and old rebels; but I never regard them. If you will not go willingly, you must go upon compulsion. We shall be obliged to tie your pretty hands and bind you to the saddle. That negro man will lead your horse, and friend Dingley will ride by your side. I will give you five minutes to decide which way you prefer to ride."

"I will go with Chester Dingley," said Edith, after a few moments' hesitation. "I will follow him without being driven; but he will repent it."

"That is his look-out," replied Major Stairn. "Good-morning, my fair captive. Content yourself as well as you can. It is a pity that you are such a rebel."

The major bowed, and rode away at the head of his men. Edith turned indignantly from Dingley when he approached her with a wheedling smile, beckoned to the negro man to ride near her, and silently followed her purchaser—for the transaction between the Tory and the British officer could only be regarded as a purchase.

CHAPTER VI.

HIDE-AND-SEEK.

ROBERT STAIRN and his friends searched long and carefully, hoping to find some traces of Edith Alston. They thought it probable that she might have become separated from her guard during the combat, and that she might have taken advantage of that circumstance to make her escape. They sought along the road, therefore, and through the woods in all directions, trying to discover some indications of the course which she had taken; but, neither in the trampled earth of the road, nor in the soft soil of the forest, could they find any track of horses going from the scene, except those of two dragoons, whose flight had soon been stopped.

It was possible, but not at all probable, that such experienced scouts might be mistaken. When they had completed their examination, and had compared their impressions, they could only come to the conclusion that Edith had not been there, that David Darfour had been misinformed, or that Major Stairn had abandoned his intention of taking her to Georgetown.

There was only one wounded dragoon left on the field, and he was so far gone that it was impossible to extract any information from him. There was, then, no way of avoiding the conclusion at which they had arrived.

"We have come on a wild-goose chase, and have accomplished nothing," said Stairn, in a tone of disappointment.

"On the contrary," replied Darrell, "I think we have come on a red-coat chase, and that we have bagged eight or nine of the game. It is a worthy exploit, and we deserve well of our country."

"But Edith—Miss Alston—we have seen nothing of her, and the object of our expedition was to rescue her from the British. That old gentleman was mistaken, or he has given us wrong information."

"You may be sure that no one has not willfully misinformed us."

my boy, and I do not believe that he has been mistaken. I have known David Darfour longer than you have, Robert, and I know him to be a man who is to be trusted. Every word that he says can be relied upon. He has often given us valuable information, and has never yet been at fault."

"Where is Edith Alston, then? He told us that we would find her with this party of British."

"Very well. We found the British, just where he told us to look for them, and the number of the party was just what he said it would be."

"Perhaps he told us that the young lady would be with them, because he wished to make sure that we would hasten to intercept them."

"David Darfour is not a man to tell a lie, even for the good of the cause. You may depend upon it that it was Major Stairn's intention to take Miss Alston to Georgetown; but he may have changed his plan. Perhaps her parents prevailed upon him to leave her at home; or perhaps she was taken ill, so that she could not go; or perhaps she has escaped from him. Any one of those suppositions is more probable than that David Darfour would give us wrong information."

"I wish we could learn something definite about it. What do you think we ought to do, Billy Gwinn?"

"Wait till Macdonald comes back," replied the lad, who had great confidence in the sergeant.

In a little while Macdonald came riding up the road, his horse foaming, and showing evidence of a hard ride.

"Did you bring your quarry to bay, my gallant hunter?" asked Darrell.

"No; he would not stand. I ran him under the guns of the fort; but his horse was too swift for me, and I could not get near enough to run him through. I had the pleasure of braving the British finely, and of hearing the long-roll beat in the streets of Georgetown. What are you discussing here, comrades?"

"We have been looking for Miss Edith Alston; but we can find no trace of her, and we have come to the conclusion that she was not with Major Stairn and his dragoon."

"Let us ride back to Judge Alston's," said Macdonald, when he had heard the statements and opinions of his friends. "We can easily learn whether Major Stairn started to take Miss Alston to Georgetown. If he did not, we have nothing more to do in the matter. If he did, we will have some further investigations to make."

This advice was so sensible, that it was at once assented to by all, and the four scouts mounted their horses, and rode up the Sandpit road.

They had not gone far, when they came to a wagon-track that led off to the right from the main road, and there they stopped for a while, as it was evident that Major Stairn's party had stopped there, and it was a matter of importance to discover why they had stopped.

All the appearances in the road were noticed, and the fresh tracks that led off into the forest road were also carefully examined.

"If Edith has been separated from Major Stairn and his party," said Rebert, "this is the spot where the separation took place."

"It is true that the indications point that way; but I am not certain that she left them here," replied Macdonald. "If my eyes tell me the truth, there are the tracks of three horses coming down the path, and of only three returning. Do any of you know to what place this road leads?"

"I know it," said Stairn. "It leads to Chester Dingley's. I told Mr. Darfour this morning that I suspected that some foul play was going on, and that Dingley had a hand in it. I am now convinced that there was some cause for my suspicions."

"You may be right. Perhaps it will be well for you and Darrell to follow the tracks in this path, while Billy Gwinn and I go on to Judge Alston's. But hold! here comes a man from whom we may get some information."

The man to whom Macdonald referred was well known to the four scouts. He was a Cherokee Indian, who had been brought into the settlements when a boy, on the return of the expedition against the Cherokees in 1761. Having been raised among the whites, he had partially acquired their habits, and his attire was a mixture of civilized and barbarous garments.

He had also acquired a name among his white friends, having at first been called Joseph, and afterward Benjamin. These designations, in the course of time, had become contracted to Ben and Jo, and had at last become united, so that the Indian was generally known through that region as Benjo, a name which pleased him greatly, as it contained so much in a small compass.

Some one had given him a rifle, with which he procured his subsistence, except when he picked up his living around the dwellings of his white protectors. One of his particular friends was Judge Alston, whose family had always treated him kindly. His devotion to Edith was well known, and it caused Macdonald to suppose that he might know something of her whereabouts.

When he saw the scouts, he came to them on a lope, and expressed his joy at meeting them.

"What are you doing this morning, friend Benjo?" asked Macdonald.

"Just looking about."

"Have you seen any British?"

"No. Have you?"

"We met a party down by the bridge; but we will never see them any more."

"Kill 'em all? That's the way to do. Benjo hates 'em."

"I am glad to hear it. Have you seen Miss Edith Alston this morning?"

"Maybe so. What you want of her? Want to carry her off?"

"Not we; but we are afraid that somebody else wants to carry her off, and we are looking for her. Do you know whether she is at home?"

"Not there."

"Where is she, then?"

"Ask Chester Dingley."

"Is it Chester Dingley who has carried her off?"

"Benjo was coming out of the swamp, and he saw Miss Edith and Dingley and a nigger riding toward Dingley's house. I wanted to speak to her; but Dingley said he would set his dogs on me. Benjo will hurt him for that, some time."

"That's where she has gone, boys. Robert guessed right this time. Major Stairn turned her over to that black-hearted Tory before he met us, and that is how we happened to miss her. How long ago did you see her, Benjo?"

"'Bout three hours ago."

"That settles the question. As it won't be worth while for us to go to Judge Alston's, we must all ride on to Dingley's and look for her there. Will you go with us, Benjo?"

"Got no hoss."

"But we are going to help Miss Edith."

"Don't want a hoss, then. Go along."

The scouts put spurs to their horses, and rode at a brisk pace, following the tracks which they had already observed, and the Indian trotted along with them, generally keeping in advance of the party.

If they had not met Benjo, but had gone on to Judge Alston's, the judge and his wife would not have gone to Georgetown, and certain events which are hereafter to be related would not have transpired at the Alston mansion.

When they came in sight of Dingley's house, they divided, so as to approach it on all sides, and prevent any one from escaping. Reaching the building, they found it shut up, with no appearance of occupation.

After beating at the doors, they at last succeeded in finding a negro man, who declared, in answer to their questions, that there was no one at home; that Mr. Dingley had been absent in Georgetown for four or five days. This was such a palpable falsehood, that they told the negro they knew he was lying, and threatened to tie him up and whip him unless he told the truth, but he still adhered to his statement.

As he continued obstinate, the scouts at last consented to deliver him to Benjo, who said that he knew a way to get the truth out of him. The Indian took the frightened negro into the woods, where some yells and howls were shortly heard, and then Benjo brought his prisoner back to the house, saying that he was willing to tell all he knew.

The negro confessed that he had gone with his master to meet the British, and had returned with him when he had brought Edith Alston to the house. Dingley had been there but a little while, he said, when the news came that Major

Stairn's party had been attacked and defeated by Marion's men, who were coming on to the house as fast as their horses could carry them. Dingley had the horses caught, and compelled Edith to mount one of them, and rode off with her in a hurry toward Georgetown, taking his overseer and two negro men.

"How long is it since he left?" asked Macdonald.

"More than an hour," replied the negro.

"It is too late for us to try to follow them. They are nearly to Georgetown, if not quite there. That Chester Dingley is an infernal scoundrel, but we can do nothing with him now."

"We can burn his houses and barns," suggested Robert Stairn, with whom revenge was uppermost. "We can make him pay for his Toryism, if for nothing else."

"You forget, Robert," replied Macdonald, "that that would be against orders."

"It would be nothing worse than the rascally Tory has done, or caused to be done, to dozens of our friends."

"But you know that General Marion's plan does not allow retaliation. He tells us to strike hard at the Tories wherever we find them in arms, but to leave them unmolested while they are peaceable."

"I don't consider that Chester Dingley is peaceable. But orders must be obeyed. For my part, I am going to follow the rascal to Georgetown."

"What will you do? You can not overtake him."

"But I may do something else. If Georgetown can hold Edith, I can find my way into it."

"I am with you, comrade," said Darrell. "It would never do to leave our work half done."

"I will be glad to have you with me. Macdonald, you and Gwinn had better go back to camp and report, and tell the General that we have taken leave of absence. Come on, Darrell. We must not let the grass grow under our horses' feet."

The four scouts then separated, Macdonald and Gwinn taking the nearest route that led to General Marion's place of concealment, and Stairn and Darrell going toward Georgetown. They left Benjo at Dingley's house, meditating on what had happened.

CHAPTER VII.

DEFIANCE.

EDITH ALSTON followed Chester Dingley without complaint or remonstrance. She knew that she was not able to escape from him then, and she judged it best to reserve her energies until it should become necessary for her to use them, or until she might see a good opportunity for their exercise.

In due time she arrived at Dingley's house, a large, old-fashioned, one-story building, with a broad veranda on all sides and negro cabins plentifully scattered about.

Dingley assisted her to alight, placed a chair for her on the veranda, and endeavored to treat her as a guest who had accepted his hospitality. He directed a negro servant to bring out a repast which he had ordered in anticipation of the occasion, and in which wines and cordials were included.

Edith so far conquered her disgust and indignation as to partake of what was set before her, knowing that she would need refreshment, whatever might happen. Dingley made himself officious in pressing upon her substantials and delicacies, and exerted himself to drive away the restraint that oppressed himself as well as his guest.

"I suppose I must thank you for my dinner, Mr. Dingley," said Edith, when she had eaten sufficiently; "but you are aware that it is not of my own will that I have come to your table. I wish to know, now, why this outrage has been committed."

"What outrage, my dear young lady?"

"You know well enough what I mean, and I trust that you will **not** attempt to address me in such familiar language. I mean to speak plainly, and I wish to understand what your intentions are."

"No harm has been done you, Miss Edith, and none is intended. I hope that you have no objection to remaining at my house for a few days, as a guest."

"You know that I do object to it, and I desire to know why

I have been brought here. Major Stairn took me from my father's house, saying that he intended to carry me to Georgetown, to be kept as a hostage for the good behavior of my family. I knew that I would be safe in the presence of the officers of the garrison and their wives, and that I would receive the treatment due to my sex and condition in life. I went, therefore, without fear or question of the result; but Major Stairn had spoken falsely, and did not intend to take me to Georgetown. I believe that there is some plot between you and that false-hearted officer of King George, in pursuance of which I have been brought here, and I wish to know what it is."

"You speak very harshly, Miss Edith. You know that I love you, and love will sometimes resort to strange measures to gain its object."

"Love!" exclaimed Edith, with a gesture of contempt. "Whatever the feeling may be that actuates you, it is far removed from love, which is pure and unselfish. There can be no love connected with such despicable meanness as you have exhibited."

"But I do love you, truly and deeply. I would have told you so long ago, and again and again, if you would have listened to me."

"I know that you sought my hand in marriage, and that I gave you plainly to understand that it never could be yours. That should have been sufficient for a gentleman; but you have taken advantage of the troubles of the times, and of your acquaintance with our British rulers and oppressors, to get me into your power, and now I wish you to tell me what you mean to do with me."

"My purpose is an honorable one, Miss Edith. I intend to make you my wife."

"You can never do so with my consent; but I must suppose that you do not intend to regard my wishes in the matter."

"You must be willing, young lady. I mean to say you ought to be willing, as it is to your interest to do what I desire you to do. Look at the position of your family. Your brother has joined the rebels, and your father is known to favor their cause. His treasonable sentiments

are so well known, that he would have been arrested long ago, and perhaps would have been hung, if it had not been for his age and infirmities. When the armies of the king triumph, as they surely will, and these colonies are again brought under subjection, his property will be confiscated, together with the estates of all the Whigs, and divided among those who have remained faithful to his majesty. Then you will be turned out, without any thing that you can call your own, unless you have a husband who is able to protect you. If you do not wish to see your parents come to poverty, you will consent to become my wife."

"Nothing under heaven would ever induce me to consent to that. Are you so sure, sir, that King George will triumph in his wicked attempt to subjugate and oppress these colonies? I, too, am a prophet, and I already see these United States of America free and independent, taking a high rank among the nations of the earth. I also see those patriots who have been faithful to the cause of liberty, honored and rewarded by a grateful country, and the prospect is closed by a disgusting view of Chester Dingley, dangling from the branch of a tree, with a rope round his neck, and the buzzards wheeling about his head."

Edith said this so confidently, and with such a defiant air, that the Tory started up in affright, and put his hand to his throat, as if he already felt the rope at his neck; but he sat down immediately, ashamed of his emotion, and flew into a passion.

"This is too bad!" he exclaimed. "I can not suffer such treasonable language to be uttered in my presence. I have as much respect for a lady as any man; but will have no more such talk under my roof."

"You had better send me away, then. How do you expect to stop my tongue? Have you enough respect for a lady to gag her?"

"I will find a way to make you do what I wish you to do. I tell you, Edith Alston, that it is useless for you to talk. My wife you must be, with your consent, if you wish to give it; without your consent, if you are obstinate and blind to your interest. It must be, I tell you, and you will find it **useless to strive against it**."

"And I tell you, Chester Dingley, that it never can and never will be. If you suppose that the daughter of Judge Alston can be frightened into measures, you are greatly mistaken. I am able to defend myself, and I defy and despise you."

The Tory's face became livid with passion, and he would have made a savage reply to Edith's bold speech, if his attention had not been arrested by the galloping of a horse, that stopped in front of his door.

The rider was one of his negro men, who had accompanied him to meet Major Stairn, and who had been sent to Georgetown with the party of dragoons. As he dismounted and ran to the house, it was evident from his manner that something had occurred to throw him into a state of the greatest excitement.

"What is the matter, Pomp?" anxiously inquired Dingley.

"De red-coats is all killed, and cut up into little bits ob pieces. Dis chile come nigh gittin' killed six or seven times, but he run away while de white folks was fightin'."

"How did it happen? Where was the fight?"

"Down by de bridge, on de Sandpit road. We was jest ridin' along, and nebber doin' nuffin to nobody, when all at once dar was de biggest kind ob a firing in front ob us, and Ginceral Marion, wid about fife hunderd men, come a-tearin' and a-splittin' at us, wid guns and swords and pistils and big dogs, shootin' and cuttin' and hollerin' and howlin'. Dey rode right ober de red-coats like nuffin, and ole Pomp got away from dar as if de debbil was arter him."

"Did they kill Major Stairn?"

"Reckon not. I caught sight ob him kitin' away toward Georgetown, and he had a mighty good hoss. Dey'll be comin' out here in a little bit, mars'r, and you had better be gittin' away. Ole Pomp is gwine to hide in de swamp."

"Wait, you black rascal! You shan't do any such thing. Call Bantas, and bring my horses up here, right away. You shall ride with me to Georgetown, if you are so much afraid of Marion and the rebels."

In a few moments the horses were saddled and ready, and Dingley informed Edith that she must mount and accompany him to Georgetown.

When she flatly refused to do so, he summoned his overseer, and told her, copying the example of Major Stairn, that she should be tied on the horse and led by one of his negroes if she persisted in her refusal.

When Edith at first refused, she had supposed that the patriots were coming on to Dingley's as the frightened negro had said; but a little reflection showed her that her friends would not be likely to seek for her in that direction, even if they knew of her captivity. She thought, also, that she would be comparatively safe in Georgetown, as Dingley would not dare to proceed to extremities there, and that she would soon meet her parents. She told the Tory, therefore, that it would not be necessary to use force, as she was ready to go with him.

Dingley cautioned the negroes who remained on the plantation, under pain of the most terrible punishment, that they should tell no one what had become of him, and that they should say nothing about the young lady. He then set out toward Georgetown with Edith, taking his overseer and two negroes as a guard. He rode rapidly and endeavored to avoid every route by which he might fall in with Marion's men.

He soon arrived safely at Georgetown, and at once inquired for Major Stairn, with whom he had a long interview. The major informed the Tory of the real nature of the attack that had been made upon his party, giving it as his opinion that information of his movements had been carried from Judge Alston's house, and that there must be rebels secreted about those premises.

The result of the conference between these plotters was, that Dingley transferred another bag of gold to the possession of Major Stairn, and that Edith was conveyed to a house in which she was locked up in a room by herself. A guard was placed at her door, and she was told that she was a prisoner, that she would not be permitted to leave the room, or to hold communication with any one.

When Judge Alston and his wife reached Georgetown, they made inquiries for Edith; but their applications for permission to see her were at first treated evasively by the officers in command, and finally were positively denied. As the

Judge, who was naturally indignant at this treatment, was quite free in the expression of his opinion, he was seized and thrown into prison.

In the mean time, reports were industriously circulated in Georgetown society, that Miss Edith Alston, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of Judge Alston, was soon to be married to Chester Dingley, of the Waccamaw district. In fact, preparations were made for a grand wedding, and the day was fixed, it being the general belief among the gossips of Georgetown that the consent of the young lady had been obtained, and that there was nothing to hinder the consummation of the nuptials.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOTHER HUBBARD.

ONE evening, about a week after Edith Alston's imprisonment, an old market woman might have been seen, leaving Georgetown by the principal road, driving leisurely before her a lean old scarecrow of a piebald mare, on each side of whose bony carcass swung an empty basket, showing that the old woman had been fortunate enough to dispose of all her marketing.

Although she had succeeded so well, she did not seem to be satisfied with the result of her day's bargaining; for her countenance was plainly expressive of disappointment and vexation, and she occasionally showed her temper by the fretful manner in which she spoke to her rawboned animal.

Perhaps her unpleasant feelings may have been occasioned by the fact that she was continually made the object of the jests and insults of the urchins of the town, who followed her with derisive remarks upon her own appearance and that of her beast of burden. Several times she turned around and shook her whip fiercely at them, and she often looked at the stones in the street, as if she would like to hurl them at the heads of her persecutors.

Although her progress was so largely attended, it looked

much of being a triumphal procession, and the old woman may well have been glad when she reached the limit of the town, where the rabble were driven back by the guard in charge of the gates.

Delivered from the insults of the urchins, she was then obliged to pass through the ordeal established by the gate-keeper, a petty tyrant, appointed by the British because of his Toryism, who delighted in annoying the Whig females who were obliged to pass his post in order to go into the country.

"Come, now, old woman," said the would-be despot. "Trot along that bag of bones, and let us see what you have in your baskets. Empty, by St. George! The good people of Georgetown must have loaded you with silver change, and I would like to peep into your pockets."

The old woman clutched her gown, and shook her head positively.

"Suspicious, are you?" chuckled the inquisitor. "Your pockets shan't be touched, if there is nothing more treasonable in them than the king's coin. What is your name, and where do you live?"

"My name is Rachel Hubbard, and I live up on Waccamaw."

"Ah, mother Hubbard! so you have come to life again. Where is your wonderful dog, mother Hubbard? I suppose you left him at home, and when you get back, you will find him dead, or smoking your pipe. Ha! ha! ha! That is a right pleasant jest. Come, now, mother Hubbard, how many yards of broadcloth have you sewed up in your petticoats?"

"None. I don't do such things," replied the old woman.

"Of course not. None of you do; but we find a bolt of it, every now and then. Uncle Levi Smith, at Charleston, first discovered the cheat, and now we search all the petticoats. It seems to me that you have a very masculine voice, for such an old witch, and I do believe that I see a beard growing on your wrinkled skin. How long is it since you shaved?"

"None of your business," tartly replied the old woman. "You had better let me alone, for I am dangerous when I get

angry. I reckon I have as good a right to shave, if I want to, as I have to smoke a pipe."

"No doubt you have; but that beard is fine and black, while your hair is coarse and gray. There is such a wonderful difference, that I must examine into the matter."

The gatekeeper quickly stepped forward, and jerked off the old woman's cap and gray wig, disclosing the dark and curling locks of Robert Stairn.

The young scout, finding himself discovered, drew back his left arm, and dealt the Tory a blow between the eyes, which laid him senseless on the ground. He then tore the baskets from his bony mare, leaped on her back, and plied his whip vigorously. The beast set off at a speed that was not at all justified by her appearance, while the bullets of the guards, who had hastened to the scene, whistled merrily about her. By the time they had mounted their horses and commenced the pursuit, the old mare had turned Richmond corner, and was nearly out of sight.

Stairn kept up the speed of the old beast for about two miles, and then turned off from the road, and disappeared in a swamp, where it would have been impossible for his pursuers to find him. When he considered himself safe, he dismounted, and divested himself of his disguise.

"I shall have no more use for those trappings," he said, as he threw the old gown into the swamp. "I do wish that one of those bullets had hit me, though it was my duty to run from them. I am tired of my life, and would certainly throw it away in the next encounter, if it were not for my poor mother."

Again he mounted his piebald steed, and urged it through the swamp until stopped by a hail and a command to halt.

Answering the hail, he went on, and soon found himself in the presence of his three friends, Macdonald, Darrell and Gwinn, who were very glad to see him, and eagerly asked him what was the news in Georgetown.

"I have little news to tell, and none that is good news," peevishly replied Stairn.

"I see that you have changed your character, and that your spotted bunch of bones has been running hard," said Macdonald. "Have you had an adventure?"

"A slight one, hardly worth mentioning. The gatekeeper had sharper eyes than I had supposed him to have, and he penetrated my disguise when I left the town. He tore off my cap and wig, showing my black hair, and I was compelled to knock him down and run for it."

"You have given the red-coats something to talk about, at least. What did you see in Georgetown?"

"Nothing unusual. The town is full of parades and junketings, and merrymaking seems to be the principal business of the British officers."

"But what of your lady-love, my gay gallant?" asked Darrell. "Did you see her, or are you in a pet because the sight of her countenance was denied to you?"

"I did not see her, and perhaps it is as well that I did not; for I doubt whether she would have had any thing to do with me, except to deliver me up to the British?"

"Fie upon you, Robert, for a poor-spirited lover! Why do you malign the young lady so vilely?"

"I have not maligned her. A woman who can be false to her love will not scruple to betray her lover."

"What do you mean? What has she done?"

"She is to be married to Chester Dingley."

"To Chester Dingley? That is not possible."

"Possible or not, it is true, and all Georgetown knows it. Nothing else is talked about there. They say that she is to marry Dingley because he has promised to save her father's estate from confiscation, and her brother's neck from the halter. She has sold herself to a Tory to obtain British mercy."

"I can't believe it," said Macdonald.

"I tell you it is the talk of the town. The day is fixed, and there is to be one of the grandest weddings ever known in Georgetown."

"When is it to be?"

"The day after to-morrow, at night."

"I wish we could be there with our broadswords. But I really do not believe the report, Robert. I am not in love with Miss Alston, as you are; I am one of her sincerest admirers, and I do not believe that she could be false to her love or her word. Neither do I believe that any thing could

induce her to marry a Tory, even if she loved him. If I were a lover, it seems to me that it would need something more than the gossip of Georgetown to make me believe such a report."

"Pshaw, Macdonald!" exclaimed Darrell. "If you were a lover, you would act just as other lovers act, and nothing is easier than to make them believe that their mistresses are untrue. But the fair sex are proverbially fickle, and it won't do to fix our hearts upon them. How many there are who would smile upon me and vow that they loved me, if I was Viscount Darlington, who now laugh at my threadbare coat, and simper jests about pride and poverty! Laugh it off, Robert, and find another, who will serve you as the last one did. What is the matter with Stuart? There must be some one coming. What is the dog growling at?"

"He is growling at you, because you hold such a poor opinion of the better part of creation," was answered in a deep voice, as an old man stepped out from the thicket which skirted the spot where they were standing.

"David Darfour!" exclaimed the scouts, surprised that any one could have approached them without being discovered.

"Yes, it is David Darfour," replied the old gentleman. "It is well for you that it is a friend, and not an enemy, as you keep such a poor watch."

"You are right, and we are greatly to blame," said Macdonald. "The fact is, that Robbie Stairn has been to Georgetown in disguise, and has just returned. We were so eager to learn the news that we omitted to set a watch, supposing that the dog would warn us if any one should come near."

"Stuart knows me too well. So you have been to Georgetown, young gentleman," continued Darfour, turning to Robert Stairn. "I saw you there, but you did not recognize me, I suppose. You have discovered, it seems, that your father-love is untrue to you, that she is about to marry another, and you believe it."

"How can I help believing it," replied Stairn, rather silently, "when it is a matter of common report? All Georgetown speaks of the marriage as a settled thing."

"You ought to believe in your lady's truth and love before all report, and in spite of the say-so of a dozen Georgetowns. But I have no right to blame you. We are all prone to jealousy, especially those who love deeply. You know Judge Alston, young sir. Do you think that he is a man who would wish to save his property at the expense of his daughter's happiness? You know Harry Alston, I am sure. Do you suppose that he would accept his life (which is no more in danger than yours is), if he knew that its price was to be his sister's marriage to a Tory, to a man whom she utterly despises? What do you say to that, sir?"

"You speak the truth, sir; but she may have been worked upon, and her love for them may have induced her to consent to this marriage."

"Edith Alston knows her father and her brother better than you do. It is not likely that she would throw herself away, even for their sake, when she knows that they would reject the sacrifice and indignantly spurn the gift."

"You give me new hope, sir, and hope is life to me now. But, if Edith has not consented to this marriage, how is it that everybody talks about it, that the day is fixed, and that all the arrangements seem to be completed?"

"If Dingley intended to force her to marry him, or to marry her by force, would it not be to his interest to spread such a report, particularly if she was placed in such a position that she could not contradict it? Men often bring about what they wish to happen, by persuading others that it undoubtedly will happen. Miss Alston is a prisoner, and even her father and mother are not permitted to see her or to know where she is. Dingley may contrive to marry her, against her will, by some trick or forcible means, if he is not interfered with; but two nights from this may show a change in the position of affairs, and that is a matter with which you have to do."

"What shall I do, sir? For God's sake tell me, and you will find me no laggard."

"You will know before long. Where is your General?"

"At Snow's island."

"Has Colonel Lee joined him?"

"We hear that he has; but we have not yet seen him."

"Can you guide me to the camp? I have something of

great importance to communicate to General Marion, and it will not bear delay."

"We will all go with you," said Macdonald, jumping up. "We have been on a scout, and were only waiting here for the return of Robert Stairn."

CHAPTER IX.

IN AND OUT OF GEORGETOWN.

THE four scouts immediately saddled and mounted their horses, and rode off, accompanied by David Darfour.

Although they rode under cover of the night, their habits of caution were such that they took by-paths and forest roads, with which they were well acquainted, to avoid encountering any bands of British or Tories that might be in the neighborhood.

It was, therefore, after sunrise when they reached the beautiful and romantic wild which Marion had chosen as his retreat and resting-place. Shut in by swamps, which could not be penetrated except by those who were familiar with their labyrinthine recesses, and surrounded by the plantations of wealthy gentlemen who favored the cause of independence, this place afforded to the partisan leader a secure refuge from his enemies, and a bountiful supply of every thing that was needed to recruit his men and animals after their arduous toils.

The scouts were delighted at finding their comrades in excellent health and in the best possible spirits, their hilarity being occasioned by the arrival of Lee's legion of cavalry, by the aid of which they expected to take the offensive, and to do something toward driving the British out of South Carolina.

David Darfour was immediately taken to the head-quarters of the camp, where he found himself in the presence of Marion and Lee. He remained with those officers about an hour, and then sought Robert Stairn and his friends, to whom he

communicated some intelligence that caused their eyes to brighten, and that set them to overhauling their arms and equipments.

The fact was that a plan had been arranged for the surprise and capture of Georgetown, and that it was to be carried into effect on the night that had been fixed, as Stairn had heard, for the marriage of Edith Alston to Chester Dingley. It was certain that that night was to be an occasion of festivity in Georgetown and that the British garrison would be entirely unprepared for an attack. A short time after midnight was the hour fixed for the attack, and the infantry were to march into the town on one side, while the cavalry charged on the other.

Our four scouts, in the advance of the column of infantry, were promptly at their posts at the designated time, waiting impatiently for the signal to attack, which was to be given by the cavalry.

They did not have long to wait; for their commander, feeling that their success depended entirely on taking the place by surprise, and knowing the danger of delay, ordered them to charge, regardless of the cavalry, who had lost their way, and had not come up in time.

It was fortunate that he did so, as the alarm would soon have been given, and their enemies would have rushed to arms to repel them. As it was, the surprise was complete, and they achieved an almost bloodless victory. The British, not supposing that Marion would dare to attack their fortified post and strong garrison, had given themselves up to enjoyment during the earlier part of the night, and were sleeping off the effects of their dissipation, when the patriots burst in upon them and captured the greater part of their force.

Robert Stairn and his three friends, after participating in the capture of the place, were joined by Harry Alston, then one of Marion's aids, who had just had the pleasure of informing his parents that he was alive and well, and that Georgetown was in the hands of the patriots. As they could give him no information concerning Edith, he joined the scouts for the purpose of seeking his sister, and their search was as thorough as it was ineffectual.

After they had gone over the whole town in a body,

making inquiries on all sides without learning the whereabouts of Edith, they concluded to separate, and to prosecute the search singly.

We must leave them to do so, while we inquire what had become of the fair object of their unavailing search.

As has been stated, Edith had been locked up as a prisoner in a house in Georgetown by Chester Dingley, aided by Major Stairn. The British officer, whose strongest controlling motive was avarice, had been purchased by the Tory to aid him in this transaction, and his alliance had been of great advantage to his associate. He had not only furnished Dingley with a guard for his prisoner, but his influence had been so exerted as to prevent all other persons, as well as her parents, from ascertaining where she was concealed. At the same time, he had taken pains to spread the report that she was to be married to Dingley, and to assure all inquirers that her free consent had been given to the match.

On the morning of the day that had been fixed upon for the marriage, he called upon Dingley to inform him that all necessary arrangements were consummated.

"All that you now have to do," said he, "is to go on and complete the business and marry the young lady. If she has any further scruples, you need only disregard them. Your way is clear."

"Any further scruples!" exclaimed Dingley. "She has nothing but scruples! She hates me, I believe, worse than they say the devil hates holy water. Scruples doesn't express her feeling in the least. I sometimes feel as if I would like to renounce the business and throw it off my hands altogether."

"Pshaw, man! how can you be so timid and weak-hearted, when you are on the eve of safely marrying a fortune? I should think it would be impossible for you to hesitate, when you reflect on what you are to gain by the marriage. You know that her father's estate is sure to be confiscated, and you can get it all, as her brother will probably swing."

"That is a fact, major. This marriage, if I can marry her, will be likely to make me the richest man in Waccamaw, if not in the colony. The Alston property, joined to mine, will

be worth owning, indeed. But I must confess that I am almost afraid of her, sometimes, and I can't help fearing that she will find some way to balk me. I wish you could marry her for me."

"I wish I could marry her for myself; but I have a young wife and two boys in Scotland, and it takes all I can scrape together to keep them alive, and support my poor old estate. All you have to do, Dingley, is to go on and finish the business. The clergyman whom I have employed knows his part, and will play it well. There can be no hindrance, unless it should come from your own timidity. I would be with you at the ceremony; but I am obliged to take a detachment with me this morning, and go off into the country, to apprehend some rebel officers who are skulking about their homes."

"You are going away?" exclaimed the Tory, in a tone of dismay. "This is entirely unexpected to me. I don't know what I shall do without you. I thought I had paid you enough to stand by me to the last."

"You have positively no need of me, my dear sir. As I have repeatedly told you, you have nothing to do but to go on and finish the business, which is all arranged for you. I have completed my contract, and you have really no further claims upon me. Besides, my military duty is imperative, and must take precedence of every thing else. I wish you good-morning."

Deserted by his ally, Dingley did not have the courage to face Edith Alston again, until the time drew near for the accomplishment of his design. He also made a change in his plan, determining to have a very private wedding, instead of the public one which had been arranged by Major Stairn. There was no knowing, he said, what pranks his intended bride might play him in the presence of company.

When the clergyman had arrived, with the few witnesses whom he desired to be present, he went up to Edith's room, in some trepidation, opened the door, and stood there with his hat in his hand.

"To what am I indebted for this visit?" asked Edith, smiling at his awkward manner.

"The fact is, Miss Edith," replied the Tory, "that everybody says I am to marry you, to-night."

"Everybody does not always speak the truth."

"But everybody is right, in this instance. The clergyman and the witnesses are below, and we are only waiting for you. Will you accompany me?"

"I will go down-stairs with you," replied Edith, not knowing but there might be some hope for her outside of her prison. "You must know that you can not marry me without my consent, and that I am sure I will never give."

Dingley made no reply, relying on the virtue of Major Stairn's "arrangement," and Edith accompanied him to a lower room, refusing to stand up with Dingley before the clergyman, who immediately commenced reading the service. When Dingley had duly promised to take that woman for his wife, Edith was asked whether she would take that man for her husband.

"No—most decidedly no," she replied.

"You may as well say yes," said the facile clergyman. "I shall understand you to mean yes; for I am empowered to celebrate this marriage, and I mean to do it. If any person present knows any lawful cause why these two should not be joined together in the bonds of wedlock, let him speak now, or—"

"Mars'r Dingley, de Marion folks is comin'! Dey's got into town by dis time, shuah! 'Fore God, I see'd a whole heap ob 'em comin' down de road, and I jess'got in ahead ob 'em."

The interruption came from one of Dingley's negroes, who having been on some nocturnal expedition, after the fashion of his race, had seen the advanced guard of Marion's infantry, and had hastened into town to escape them. Meeting no one in the town, he had come direct to his master, who, as he well knew, had good reason to wish to avoid Marion's men.

His story was quickly told, and was soon corroborated by a tumult in the town, the nature of which could not be misunderstood.

Directing the guard to bring Edith out, Dingley rushed to the carriage at the door, pulled the sleeping driver from his seat, and put his negro man in his place. Thrusting Edith into the carriage, he entered it together with the soldier and

the clergyman, and ordered the negro to drive rapidly out of the town and clear of Marion's men.

The driver, impelled by his own fears, put the horses to the top of their speed, and the carriage was soon outside of Georgetown, tearing along a road in an opposite direction to that by which he had seen the patriots approaching.

This rate of traveling was moderated when the party was well out of the town, as they did not see or hear any thing more to frighten them; but the negro still drove rapidly toward the north. Edith Alston, with an armed soldier at her side, and with Chester Dingley and the clergyman seated opposite to her, knew that she had no chance to escape, and submitted to her fate in silence. Nothing was said on the way, except when Dingley would put his head out of the window and ask the driver if he saw any thing on the road.

Thus they proceeded for about two hours, until a short time before daybreak, when the negro suddenly stopped his horses, and uttered a yell of fright. Dingley looked out of the window to ask what was the matter, and saw the road filled with armed men; but he could not tell, in the darkness, to what party they belonged. Edith also perceived what had caused the obstruction, and hoped that they had met a band of Marion's men.

"Thank God that I am among friends at last!" she said, as an officer rode up the window.

"Yes, Miss Alston," was the reply, in the well-known voice of Major Stairn. "You are among your best friends. We are friends to you and to King George. What is the matter, Dingley?"

"Matter enough. Marion's men came rushing into Georgetown some two or three hours ago, and captured the place."

"The deuce! It can't be possible! Were they not driven out again?"

"I didn't wait to see; but I don't believe they were. It was a complete surprise."

"Is this lady your wife?"

"Not quite, I suppose. The infernal Whigs got in too soon."

"Where are you going now?"

"To my house."

"You had better not. A band of rebels are camped there."

"We must go to Judge Alston's, then. I suppose his house is empty."

"I suppose it is, and that is the only chance I know of. I don't like the place, but I will accompany you, and will stay there until I can get some news, as it is useless to try to return to Georgetown now."

Chester Dingley drew his breath more freely, and Edith felt a new sense of depression, as the driver whipped up his horses, and the carriage rolled on toward Judge Alston's house, escorted by Major Stairn and his detachment of cavalry.

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD HOUSE INVADED.

Mrs. MARGARET STAIRN, the mother of our young scout, was past the prime of life, but was still a very fine-looking, if not a handsome woman. Her ladylike air and manner, as well as the correctness of her language and the style of her conversation, indicated that she had been bred to a higher station than that which she occupied in South Carolina. Although universally respected, she was a poor woman, and her son Robert had been her sole dependence before the war. When Marion began to make head against the British and Tories, after the defeat of Gates at Camden, Robert Stairn had joined the partisan leader, with the reluctant consent of his mother, who had thereafter been obliged to use the closest economy, in order to support herself. She was a silent and melancholy woman, whose earthly hope was centered in her son, upon whom she lavished all the affection of a loving and earnest heart.

When Judge Alston, instead of offering her the shelter of his house, delicately requested her to come and take charge of it during the absence of his family, she accepted the offer,

all the more gladly because her Tory landlord was about to drive her from the cabin which she occupied, and at once took possession of the old mansion.

The greater part of the negroes belonging to the plantation were still on the premises and under her direction, and she found the larder stored with an abundance of provisions, which she was told to use as her own. For the first time in many years, the widow Stairn, as she was generally called, found herself surrounded by comfort and plenty.

Benjo, the Cherokee Indian, who has once made his appearance in this narrative, was strongly attached to Mrs. Stairn, whom he looked up to with a great deal of reverence. When she moved into Judge Alston's house, he took up his quarters there, which suited her as well as it pleased him, as he was useful in many ways.

One morning early, Benjo had taken his rifle and gone out to shoot some squirrels, and Mrs. Stairn, employed about her household affairs, was thinking about her absent son, and wishing that she might see him. The Indian had been gone about an hour, when he came running back to the house, with as much excitement visible in his manner as his nature would allow him to express.

"Red-coats comin'," he said, in reply to Mrs. Stairn's question.

"How many?"

"Big heap. Carriage and horses, and plenty of red-coats."

"Are you sure? Are they coming here?"

"Sartin. Heard Major Stairn speak about comin' here, and Benjo ran home to tell you."

"Major Stairn! Who is Major Stairn?"

"Big, red-faced man. Looks mighty big, and talks mighty big."

The widow sunk into a chair, and her limbs trembled, and her face turned deathly pale.

"I must go away from here, Benjo," she said. "The red-coats might not harm me, but I am afraid of that man. I would not meet him for the world. I will gather up a few things, and will run out at the back way. Will you go with me?"

"Sartin. Where will you go?"

"I don't know. Anywhere, to get away from this place, and to avoid meeting that man. You will help me to carry the bundles, Benjo, and we must hurry."

The willow hastily gathered together a few articles of clothing and other necessities, part of which she gave to Benjo and the other part she carried in her arms, and hastened out at the back door. She had gone but a few steps, when she was again startled, by the appearance of a gray haired man, with a mask on his face, who stepped out from behind the shrubbery and confronted her.

"Be calm," said the stranger, perceiving, from the agitation of her manner, that she was greatly frightened. "There is no occasion for alarm. It is not necessary that you should leave this place."

"Who are you? What do you want?" gasped Mrs. Stairn; for the voice of the stranger had frightened her even more than his mysterious appearance.

"I hope you will trust me as surely as you know me," replied the unknown, dropping the mask from his face, and revealing the features of David Darfour.

"Don't be scared. He is a good man," said Benjo, who was well acquainted with Darfour.

But Mrs. Stairn was terribly moved. The blood came and went in her cheeks, and she seemed ready to fall to the ground; though she roused herself to repel Darfour when he made a motion to support her.

"Don't touch me!" she said. "What do you wish me to do? I thought you were dead."

"I am not dead, as you see. But I have no story to tell, nor is this a time or place for stories. Give me that bundle, and follow me."

Mrs. Stairn quietly obeyed, and followed the strange old man, with Benjo, back into the house.

"Show me all that belongs to you here," said Darfour.

The willow pointed out various articles, and Darfour directed Benjo to carry them quickly into another room, the door of which he opened. When this was finished, he led Mrs. Stairn into the same room, and locked it behind them.

This strange proceeding was hardly completed, when Dingley's carriage drove up the avenue, and he alighted and

approached the house, together with Edith Alston, Major Stairn and the clergyman. The dragoons dismounted in the avenue, and tied their horses to the shade-trees that lined the graveled road.

"I thought that this house was unoccupied, Dingley," said Major Stairn, as he entered the open door.

"So did I. I supposed we would find it shut up. I wonder if Judge Alston has returned and taken possession."

"Of course not. He was safe in Georgetown jail yesterday morning, and he can hardly have got here before us, if the rebels released him. There is something strange about this house, Dingley. I have never been here but some extraordinary event has occurred. It was just at this hall-door that two of my men were cut with swords in a most mysterious manner. I don't like the way in which the house seems to be open for us, and I doubt whether we will find any person in it."

"You must have a queer fit on you this morning, major. Let us look around and see what we can find."

They entered the parlor, the shutters of which were fastened, and the curtains were drawn, as if it had not been opened in some time, though the carpet and furniture were all clean and well dusted. They then went into the sitting-room, where they found very evident traces of recent occupancy.

"Some people have been here very lately; that is certain," said Dingley. "A woman has been among them, too. I wish I knew who they were and where they have gone to."

Major Stairn did not seem to hear what was said by his companion. He had picked up a prayer-book from a table, and was gazing intently, with his eyes wide open in wonder, at the title-page, on which was written the name of Margaret Stairn.

"Margaret Stairn!" he said, as if speaking to himself. "That was my sister's name. Can this have been her book? How does it happen to be here? I—I really wish, Dingley, that we had not come to this house."

Edith Alston had not forgotten that her parents were to invite Mrs. Stairn to take charge of their home during their absence, and she might easily have cleared up the mystery that troubled the major; but she did not choose to do so.

"Pshaw, major!" replied Dingley. "As I have already told you, you seem to have a queer fit on this morning, and you ought to shake it off. For my part, as the Whigs have taken charge of my house, I am glad of the chance to take charge of a Whig's house. We are in comfortable quarters, I know, and I mean to hunt up the servants and look after something to eat."

As the servants had not left the premises, Dingley found what he wanted, and soon an excellent breakfast, smoking hot, was placed on the table, to which all sat down, including the officers of Major Stairn's detachment, and Edith, who consented to preside at one end of the board.

During the meal the negroes were called in and interrogated as to who had been occupying the house during the absence of the Alston family; but a look from Edith was sufficient to put them on their guard. They could only say that "Miss Margaret" had been living there; but they knew her by no other name, and could not say what had become of her. This only increased Major Stairn's perplexity, and even the good breakfast did not cause the muscles of his troubled face to relax.

As the dragoons were likely to remain at that place for some days, Major Stairn arranged their encampment, and dispatched two of them as scouts and messengers, to bring news from Georgetown and Fort Watson. Though he was strongly prejudiced against the house, he was not willing to leave such good quarters, and he did not know where to go, until he could gain some definite information concerning the movements of Marion and the position of the British forces. He concluded to remain where he was, therefore, mentally resolving that he would not pass a night under the roof of the old mansion.

These matters arranged, the major and Dingley had leisure to discuss another affair, the marriage of the latter to Edith Alston.

Having obtained the assurance of the clergyman, Williams, who had been well paid to prostitute the duties of his high office to their base purposes, to the effect that he was ready to perform the ceremony, in spite of the opposition of one of the parties to the contract, it was arranged that the marriage

should take place that night, in the parlor of the mansion, as Major Stairn objected to the sitting room. Edith was kept a prisoner in the meantime, and was not allowed to hold communication with any of the servants.

After supper the parlor was lighted, and a small company was assembled there, consisting of Major Stairn and two of his officers, the clergyman, Dingley and Edith. An abundance of Judge Alston's choice wine and brandy was placed on a table, in order that the principal performers might strengthen their nerves by frequent potations.

Major Stairn and Dingley helped themselves pretty liberally to the stimulants, and the latter, feeling elated and quite secure, seated himself in a chair near the door, waiting until he should be called upon to perform his part.

Williams, having succeeded in swallowing as much wine as he wanted, took his position behind a table, and called upon the parties who were to be married to present themselves before him.

Dingley started up for the purpose of leading Edith to the impromptu altar; but suddenly discovered that his legs and arms were securely fastened to the chair in which he was seated. The result of his movement was, that he fell over on the floor, with the chair on his back.

"What is the matter, Dingley? Are you drunk?" asked Major Stairn.

"No. The devil is in the house, sure," replied Dingley, endeavoring to extricate himself from the chair.

When the major had released his ally, and had vainly inquired how he came to be bound to his chair, he, also, came to the conclusion that the devil was in the house. He was immediately confirmed in this belief by a peal of hollow, mocking laughter, that seemed to proceed from the walls of the room.

"I declare to you, Dingley," said the major, "that I will not remain another moment in this house after dark. If it was the first time that I had witnessed such scenes here, I might not be troubled; but this is one of a series. You may continue the ceremony, if you wish to, or may postpone it until morning. For my part, I am going to camp."

Dingley protested that he was not afraid; but Williams

was evidently excited and timid, and it was agreed that the marriage should take place in the morning.

Edith, who had remained seated, a silent and amused spectator of the proceedings, was as much puzzled as the others, although she did not lose her equanimity. She was taken back to her own room, as she had requested that that might be the place of her captivity, and her request had been granted, because there was no safer room in the house.

Major Stairn and Williams went to the camp to sleep; but Dingley persisted in remaining in the house.

CHAPTER XI.

APPEARANCES AND DISAPPEARANCES.

THE next morning there was a new development, which astonished Major Stairn and Dingley more than any that had preceded it.

A soldier was sent up-stairs to bring Edith down to breakfast. He knocked at her door, but received no answer. He knocked more loudly, and again and again; but all was silent within. He applied his eye and his ear to the keyhole; but could see or hear nothing. He returned to the dining-room, and reported the facts to his officer.

Somewhat surprised at such conduct on the part of the young lady, and feeling that they had a right to be indignant, Dingley and Major Stairn and Williams went up to her room together, determined to bring her down and to give her a lecture.

They knocked at the door as the soldier had done, and called upon Edith to open it; but neither their presence nor their peremptory demands could provoke any reply from the young lady. They severally looked and listened at the keyhole, but nothing was visible or audible to any of them.

At last they concluded to force open the door, and this was done with an ax. They entered the room, and found no person within it. It was evident that the bed had been

slept in; but the occupant was not visible. They searched in the bed and under the bed, and in every corner of the room; but found nothing human except themselves. Edith was not there, and the next question was, How had she escaped.

The guard who had been on duty at her door during the early part of the night, was called, together with the soldier who had relieved him at midnight. Both declared that they had not slept at their posts, or even nodded; that they had not heard the least noise in the room; and that it would have been impossible for any one to pass in or out, without their knowledge. The soldiers were vouched for by Major Stairn as being faithful men, who could not be bribed or frightened from their duty.

The room had no other opening but the window, and that was so high above the ground that no one would think of jumping out. It might have been possible for some one on the outside to raise a ladder, by which Edith might have descended; but the window was found to be securely fastened on the inside, entirely precluding such a supposition.

The mystery could not be solved, and the confederates silently returned to the dining-room. As they were unable to do justice to the subject, they said nothing about it, but swallowed their amazement with their breakfast.

After Major Stairn had finished the morning inspection of his command, and had attended to such other duties as required his personal presence, he went to the house, to consult with Dingley and Williams, over Judge Alston's wine and brandy, concerning the new turn that affairs had taken.

"It is very strange and unaccountable," said Williams, who was not disposed to commit himself to any decided opinion.

"It is the work of the devil," opined Dingley. "Nobody but the devil could have tied me in a chair as I was tied last night, or have carried off Edith Alston through the wall or the roof of this house."

"I have seen more of this than you have, gentlemen," said Major Stairn, "and my conclusion is, either that these occurrences must be the work of spirits of the dead, or that this house is a hiding-place for rebels, who are using it for their

own purposes. At first, when my soldiers were so mysteriously cut in the hall, I supposed men were hidden about the house, who were acting in collusion with the family; but I have heard voices here, since that time, and they have spoken to me of matters connected with my family affairs, with which no person in the Carolinas could possibly be acquainted. I am not ashamed to confess, even in the presence of my friend Williams, that I am inclined to believe that this house is haunted by the spirits of the dead. He will excuse me for thus expressing my opinion, as we canny Scotch have a hereditary right to believe in the supernatural. As it is possible, however, that I may be wrong, and that these strange occurrences may be the work of hidden rebels, we had better search the house and investigate the question thoroughly. If Miss Alston was carried away by mortal hands, there must be some opening in the wall or floor of her room, through which she was taken."

Chester Dingley had a strong pecuniary interest in the question. Not only did he hope to profit largely by his marriage with Edith Alston, but he disliked to lose the investment, amounting to a few hundred pounds, with which he had secured the services of Major Stairn and Williams. He had his own ideas of the matter, and thought it fully possible that his military ally might himself have spirited the young lady away, in order to extort more money from her would-be husband. He did not express this opinion, however, but agreed to the major's proposition.

Taking a soldier with an ax, the confederates went up to Edith's room, as it was thought best that the search should commence there. As the blinds were closed, and the curtains were down, the room was only half lighted by the door, and the portrait which Edith had taken from the sitting-room hung in the shadow, where it could not easily be distinguished.

They commenced operations by taking up the carpets, and carefully examining the floor; but they found no indication of a trap-door or any other means by which an entrance could be effected.

"The opening must be in the walls, if anywhere," said Major Stairn, looking around the room.

As he did so, his glance fell on the portrait, which seemed

to be gazing at him reproachfully from its frame, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise and terror.

"How came that picture here?" he said, in a husky voice. "If there is a devil about the house it is in that picture. I will take it down and burn it, and then perhaps there will be an end of these disturbances."

So saying, he advanced angrily toward the portrait, when suddenly the face disappeared from his view, and in its stead there was the copper-colored countenance of an Indian, with its white teeth grinning and its wild eyes flashing at him.

With a cry of astonishment and terror the major started back, and fell on the floor; but he immediately picked himself up, and ran out of the room, followed by Dingley and the soldier, who had also been frightened by the same appearance.

"What is the matter?" asked Williams, who had been standing outside of the door.

"The picture!" gasped Dingley, whose face was white with fear, and who could scarcely speak for his fright.

Curiosity prompted Williams to peep into the room and look at the portrait; but he saw nothing unusual, and he followed the others down-stairs, wondering what could have happened to frighten them.

The confederates did not halt in their flight until they reached the dragoon camp, where they remained until dinner-time.

As dinner had been set out in the dining-room, and as their courage had gradually revived, they concluded that they were not afraid of the old house or of its ghostly occupants, and that it would be better to go to their dinner, than to have their dinner brought to them. They therefore went up in a body, trying to appear more stout-hearted than they were.

They got through with their dinner very well, as they all were fond of the good things of this world, and were accustomed to enjoy their regular meals. It is true that they would start at every unexpected noise in the room, and turn pale if a negro came in suddenly with a dish; but they succeeded in keeping their spirits up, according to the old saying, by pouring spirits down, and by being ashamed to show each other how much they were afraid.

When they had finished eating, they applied themselves vigorously to drinking, after the old fashion. They drank freely, because they were resolved to make the most of Judge Alston's wine and brandy while they had it in their power to do so, and because they considered it necessary to keep their spirits up in the manner that has already been mentioned.

Conversation was naturally mingled with their drinking, and it turned upon the strange and startling occurrences of the morning. Their courage rose as the liquor mounted into their heads, and they discussed the subject quite freely and boldly.

"Did you see the face plainly, Dingley?" asked the major. "I must have had the first and best view of it, I suppose, as I was walking toward the portrait, and had my eyes fixed upon it when the thing appeared."

"I reckon I saw it as plainly as you did, major, and as soon," replied the Tory. "I looked at the picture when you spoke of taking it down, and was looking at it when that face started out."

"What did it look like? What did you suppose it to be?"

"It looked like nothing in the world but an Indian's face, and it was so natural and lifelike that it seemed to stand right out from the canvas. I could have sworn that Benjo was looking at us from that picture."

"Who is Benjo?"

"A good-for-nothing Indian, who stays about this settlement. The face was exactly like him."

"Are you sure that you are not both mistaken?" inquired Williams. "Is it not possible that this was one of those cases of optical delusion, of which we have often heard? I stepped into the room after you rushed out of it, and looked carefully at the portrait; but I saw nothing but the likeness of a fine-looking, middle-aged gentleman."

"We know what we saw," replied the major, "and we are certain that there was no optical delusion about it. I said that the devil was in that picture, and I was right about it. Dingley ought not to have put Miss Alston into that room while it was hanging there."

"Whose portrait is it?" asked the clergyman.

"Ronald Murdison's."

"And who is Ronald Murdison?"

"A Scotchman," evasively replied the major.

"Your answers are plain enough, but they give very little information."

"The fact is, gentlemen, he was my brother-in-law. He married my only sister, and lived unhappily with his wife. At last he left her, and came to this colony, and built this house. His wife, also, left her home, and came to America, and died here. He returned to England once, remained but a short time, and died on his passage back to America. There is nothing wonderful about it, except that his spirit seems to haunt this house which he built. In the sitting-room, while the picture was hanging there, I heard a voice, sounding exactly like his voice while he was living, and it spoke to me of certain circumstances with which no living person in the colonies is likely to have any acquaintance. It is the picture that has the devil in it, I believe; for none of these strange manifestations seem to take place, except in its presence or in its vicinity. I am bound to destroy that portrait, and then—"

"*Alexander Stairn!*"

The hollow and solemn voice which the major then heard did not proceed from the portrait, certainly; for that was still hanging in Edith's room, as he had left it when he was frightened away. The voice now seemed to come from a closet in which plates and dishes were kept, and it continued its utterances while the three confederates were speechless with wonder and affright.

"Alexander Stairn, your time is drawing to a close. Your final hour will soon arrive. Repent, and prepare for eternity. You are the last male of your race; for your two sons are dead and cold, and their mother is weeping at their tomb."

There was no further utterance of the voice, and nothing could have increased the effect upon its hearers. Dingley and the clergyman sat and stared blankly at each other, unable to speak or to move a muscle. Upon Major Stairn the effect was still more striking. A livid paleness settled upon his face, his lower jaw sunk, foam stood upon his lips, and his eyeballs rolled in their sockets. This continued for about two

minutes, when he fell from his chair upon the floor in a death-like swoon.

His two companions, startled by his fall, were suddenly awakened to a sense of his condition, and hastened to his assistance. By the aid of water and brandy they succeeded in reviving him, and getting him on his feet, and then, one supporting each of his arms, they led him out of the house, although their fright had made them nearly as weak as the man whom they were assisting.

When they reached the camp, Major Stairn was put to bed to recover his strength; Dingley walked moodily about, and the clergyman sat down to read his Bible, which he pondered with more attention than he had lately bestowed upon it.

CHAPTER XII.

DINGLEY'S DOOM.

BEFORE night, Major Stairn had so far regained his strength, that he sat up and had a long conversation with Dingley; but he was an altered man, so changed that he hardly looked like the same individual who had gone blustering up to Edith Alston's room in the morning. His face, usually so red, was pale and cadaverous; his eyes were sunken, his gait was unsteady; his motions were uncertain, and he had a downcast and listless air, like that of a prisoner who has passed a weary time in a dungeon, and to whom death would be a relief.

"The fact is, Dingley," said he, "that I must get away from this place. I can not stand any more of those ghostly manifestations, or whatever they may be. Another such shock as I experienced to-day would be the death of me."

"I believe you, major," replied the Tory. "I thought that you were going to die, when it happened. You would be astonished, if you should look in a glass and see how you are changed. I must get away from this place, too; but I would

like to know, major, where you expect to go to, and what you mean to do."

"I must stay in this neighborhood until events take a turn, so that I can tell their course with some certainty. If the enemies of his majesty gain the day in this district, I must make my way to Charleston, or must go up into North Carolina. I have a messenger on his way from Charleston, and I hope that he will find me here, as I am very anxious to hear from home. I am afraid, Dingley, that the voice spoke the truth, when it said that my children were dead."

"Do you really believe that, major?"

"I am afraid that it is true. The boys were in good health when I last heard from them; but the spirits of the dead always speak the truth. If my children are dead, I have nothing more to live for."

At this moment a dragoon entered the cabin and informed Major Stairn that his scouts had returned, bringing with them a messenger from Charleston, who had some letters for him.

The major ordered them to be sent to him immediately, and when they arrived he listened to the report of the scouts, before opening the package of letters, which he seemed almost afraid to touch.

They reported that Georgetown was in the possession of the patriots, and that Marion and Lee had gone to besiege Fort Watson.

Major Stairn then opened his package, and his glance fell at once on a letter with a British postmark and a black seal. He opened it hastily and with trembling hands, and at once found confirmation of the evil tidings that he had received through the mysterious voice. His two boys, his only living children, had been taken with the small-pox, and had fallen victims to that dreaded destroyer.

Without finishing the letter, he crushed it in his hand, bowed his head on the table, and wept like a child. This burst of emotion helped him, as being a relief to his pent-up feelings. When he rose to his feet, he looked stronger and better, although he was as haggard as if years had suddenly passed over his head.

"I told you, Dingley," said he, "that the spirits of the dead always speak the truth. There is nothing for me to do now but to go to Charleston or up into North Carolina. The latter, I think, will be the best plan. I must wait a few days, however, as it is possible I may receive some instructions from my superiors. Suppose you ride over to your place in the morning, and see in what condition the rebels have left it; for I have no doubt that they have gone away. I hope that you will have no objection to my camping there a little while, with my detachment."

"None at all, my dear sir. I am always proud to accommodate his majesty's troops. I will ride over in the morning, as you suggest. But what is to be done about Edith Alston? Am I to give her up?"

"I don't know that any thing can be done at present. She has mysteriously disappeared, and we can do nothing with her until we find her. You must always catch your fish before you can cook it."

"True enough, sir; but I can't bear to be disappointed in that way, particularly when I have spent so much money."

"As it can't be helped, you will be obliged to endure it. Good-night, Mr. Dingley. It is necessary for me to lie down and get some rest."

The Tory started early in the morning to ride to his farm, as he was anxious to see what ravages had been committed by his Whig enemies. He expected to see his crops destroyed and his houses and barns burned, as such was the practice of the British and their Tory allies toward the Whigs.

In this he was agreeably disappointed; for it was not the policy of Marion to retaliate upon the Tories for the barbarities practiced by his enemies. On the contrary, he always discouraged such acts, and prevented them when it was in his power to do so. By precept and example he always opposed retaliatory warfare.

Dingley reached his plantation without mischance, and found every thing as he had left it, or nearly so. The patriots had taken only what they had needed for themselves and their horses, molesting nothing else about the place. His negroes

were at home as usual, not having been interfered with in any way.

After inspecting his house and grounds, and directing the servants to make preparations to receive the soldiers who might be expected the next day, he mounted his horse, and set out to return to Judge Alston's.

His feelings were not at all pleasant as he rode back, although he had found affairs in such a satisfactory condition at home. He felt sore concerning Edith Alston, and thought that he had been treated badly by somebody and in some way, though he could not tell how it had been done, or who was to blame.

Dingley was an avaricious man, and it was love of lucre, rather than love of her fair self, that had induced him to wish to marry Edith Alston, as he had hoped to enter into possession of her father's estates, when they should be confiscated by the conquering British. To lose this hope, as well as the money that he had already expended to secure his end, was too much for his equanimity, and it was no wonder that he felt sour and revengeful.

Although Major Stairn had suffered so severely by the occurrences at Judge Alston's house, Dingley was not yet fully convinced that that officer was not responsible for the disappearance of Edith. This doubt, together with his uncertainty as to what had become of her, kept him in a very unpleasant state of perplexity.

As he was indulging in these bitter reflections, he reached the Sandpit road, at the point where he had met Major Stairn and Edith on their way to Georgetown. Dingley knew the spot well. It was to this place that he had come to meet the British officer when he was sent for, and here he had paid over the money that had induced Major Stairn to put him in possession of Edith Alston. From this place he had taken her to his house, where she had treated him with contempt and defiance, prophesying that his career would find its limit at the end of a rope.

Dingley shuddered as he recalled Edith's confident prediction, and mentally execrated the place where he had made the bargain for her, declaring that ill-luck had followed him since the day of that transaction.

His reverie was suddenly brought to a close by an exultant shout, a hail and a command to halt. Starting and looking around, he found himself surrounded by four men whom he had good reason to dread—Macdonald, Robert Stairn, Darrell and Gwinn. Stairn seized his horse by the bridle, Darrell and Gwinn had their rifles leveled and pointed at him, and Macdonald sternly ordered him to dismount.

"Get down off that horse, you miserable Tory?" said the sergeant. "You are the very man we wanted to see. We have an account to settle with you. Get down in a hurry, or I will drag you down."

"Certainly, gentlemen; I am entirely at your service," said Dingley, as he tremblingly dismounted. "What do you want with me?"

The horse was hitched to a tree, and his captors formed a circle around him. The face of Robert Stairn, full of anger and vengeance, and the stern countenances of the others, made them seem to the affrighted Tory like executioners ready to perform their office.

"What do you want, gentlemen?" he again asked. "You look as if you had some cause of complaint against me. I hope you don't mean to murder me. It is true that my political opinions differ from yours; but I ought to be allowed to enjoy them unmolested."

"Not your political opinions, you heartless wretch," replied Macdonald, "but your cruel and cowardly actions ought to doom you to death. Have you allowed your Whig neighbors to enjoy their opinions unmolested? No; you have persecuted them in every way."

"I have done only what his majesty's officers told me it was my duty to do."

"You have had a fine opportunity for the exercise of your private malignity. You have plundered and oppressed the Whigs of this district to the best of your ability. You have driven them from their homes; you have destroyed their property; you have helped to consign them to the dungeon and the halter. For these crimes you deserve to die. But our General has forbidden us to do justice upon such as you, and you are safe on that score."

The Tory drew a long breath of relief.

"But we have a private account to settle with you," continued Macdonald. "We wish to know what has become of Miss Edith Alston. We want the whole truth from you, and we mean to have it."

"I am willing to tell you the whole truth, gentlemen," replied Dingley; "but I assure you that I do not know what has become of her. She has disappeared, and I am as ignorant of her whereabouts as you are."

"What do you mean by saying that she has disappeared?"

"I mean that she has vanished—that she has gone away mysteriously, I don't know how or where."

"We know that Major Stairn took her from her home, saying that he was going to carry her to Georgetown, and transferred her to you; that you took her to your house, and thence to Georgetown, where a report was spread that you were to marry her. You are responsible for her, and you had better tell us the whole truth."

"I will tell you all, gentlemen. When Marion came into Georgetown, I took Miss Edith to her home—to her father's house. She went to her room as usual, only the night before last, and I must confess that she was locked in, so that she could not escape. The next morning she was gone, and I searched for her in vain. Since then I have seen nothing of her."

"A likely story!" said young Stairn, who had looked on in silence, not trusting himself to speak. "Macdonald, I would like to say a few words to you in private, if Darrell and Gwinn will guard the prisoner."

The Scotchman walked aside with his friend, and they conversed earnestly together for a few minutes. Then they returned to Dingley, with their countenances more serious than ever.

"Your story is a very improbable one," said Macdonald, "and we do not believe a word of it. I have said that we mean to get the truth out of you, and we will hang you to this tree unless you tell us what has become of Miss Alston."

"Indeed, gentlemen, I do not know," gasped the Tory. "I assure you that I have told you all. Have mercy upon me for I am not ready to die."

"Bring the rope," said Macdonald.

Robert Stairn knotted a rope and placed it around the neck of the prisoner, while the others tied his hands behind his back. The loose end of the rope was then thrown over a limb of the tree, and the three younger scouts, at a signal from Macdonald, commenced to run up the Tory, notwithstanding his cries and entreaties.

The rope was gradually stretched, until the victim was lifted from his feet, and grew black in the face. As the pressure upon his throat was fast strangling him, he uttered some inarticulate sounds, which Macdonald regarded as indicating a desire to confess, and he ordered the rope to be lowered.

When the Tory had regained his feet and his breath, he was again commanded to tell what had become of Edith Alston.

"I would gladly tell you if I could," he feebly replied; "but I have already told you all. I solemnly swear to you that I do not know what has become of her. You may kill me, but I can say nothing more."

"This may be the truth, comrades," said Macdonald. "It must be the truth; for the coward would not stand so much hanging, without telling all he knew. We will have to let him off."

"I suppose so," replied Stairn; "but we may as well punish him a little for the wrong he has done and tried to do. Let us stand him on that stump, and stretch the rope so that he can't get down. If he has any friends, some one will relieve him before he starves to death."

This proposition met with favor, and was carried out. The Tory was placed standing on a stump under the tree, and the rope was drawn up and fastened, so that he could not descend from the stump without hanging himself. The four scouts then mounted and rode away, taking the horse of their captive as lawful prize.

Dingley, who was glad enough to be let off with life, saw them depart with a feeling of relief. His position was a very unpleasant one, but it was better than death, and he could endure it, he thought, until help should come to him. Some of his negroes, he supposed, would be ranging the woods, and would come to his assistance. If this should not happen, he knew that he was near a public road, and had no doubt

that he would be observed before long by some passing traveler.

As time wore away, however, he began to think that he had reckoned without his host, and a shuddering terror came over him—a fear that he would be left there through the night, until his limbs would refuse to support their burden, and he would fall, through sheer inability to stand up any longer into the death that he dreaded.

Hour after hour passed by. The sun had gone down, and twilight would soon yield to darkness. His fate was upon him, and he gloomily thought of Edith Alston's prediction, when she pictured him swinging by a rope from the branch of a tree. Already his limbs were so weary that they seemed ready to give way under him. In vain he had strained his eyes by looking up and down the road and into the forest; no help had come near him. He yelled desperately for assistance. His voice was cracked and husky; but it sounded shrill and wild on the evening air, startling the denizens of the forest, and frightening himself with its unearthly echoes.

He screamed until his parched throat refused to serve him any longer; but he accomplished his purpose. Help was near. He heard footsteps hastening down the road. He breathed more freely, and already he felt strong again, as he vowed vengeance upon the men who had left him to suffer.

The footsteps rapidly drew nearer, and a man came running to him, who stopped and gazed at the strange sight. It was Benjo, who, as the Tory well knew, had no cause to love him, but who would, at least, help him out of this difficulty. As the Indian recognized Dingley, his wild eyes glistened, and he showed his white teeth in a very expressive grin.

"Come and let this rope down Benjo," said the Tory. "Hurry, my man; for I am tired nearly to death, and can't stand here much longer."

"You want Benjo to let you down?" coolly replied the Indian. "You kick him out of your house for that? You say you set your dog on him for that? Benjo guess you better stay there."

"Don't bear malice, Benjo. I will be a good friend to you, and will always take care of you, if you will untie this rope or cut it."

"Benjo thought he might hurt you, some time. Good time now. Benjo goin' to let you up, 'stead of let you down."

"What do you mean? I will give you a hundred pounds, Benjo. I will give you a thousand. Don't do that! Mercy! Mercy!"

The Indian had quickly unfastened the rope, and, exerting his strength, he ran his victim up two feet above the stump, choking the last despairing shriek of the Tory. He then tied the rope to the tree, and sat down by the roadside, to contemplate the struggles of his enemy.

Those struggles were soon over. Benjo shouldered his rifle and walked up the road, while the beams of the rising moon fell on the lifeless body and the distorted features of Chester Dingley.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAVALIER'S ADVENTURE.

HERBERT DARRELL was of a romantic nature. Although he had little opportunity for indulging his romantic tendencies, they would crop out in spite of circumstances. His life, since he arrived at years of discretion, had been a struggle of pride with poverty, and the war found him at the lowest ebb. Poor as he was, and galling as were the chains of his poverty, he found some consolation in remembering his noble birth, and in reflecting on what he might have been if he had received the title of Viscount Darlington, if six children had not stepped in between him and a possible inheritance.

As his companions, although they did not ridicule these feelings, treated them with comparative indifference, Darrell was fond of indulging them in solitude. Night was his favorite time for reverie, and he often rode out alone, under the moon, while his comrades were asleep, and while he should have been enjoying the repose of the bivouac.

When the four scouts had finished settling their account with Chester Dingley, and had left him standing on a stump under a tree by the roadside, they sought a retired spot in the

neighborhood, with which they were well acquainted, where they intended to camp for the night. They had but lately come into the district, having been sent to watch the proceedings of Tories about the Waccamaw, and Dingley was one of the first persons of their acquaintance who had been met by them.

They easily found the retreat that they were looking for, and cooked and ate their frugal supper, after which Macdonald, with Stairn and Gwinn, laid down to sleep; but Darrell said that he would take a ride in the moonlight, to see what he could see. His friends made no objection, as his moonlight rides were often productive of good, in discovering some camp or movement of the enemy, or gaining other valuable intelligence. Accordingly, the cavalier mounted his horse, and rode forth alone, leaving Stuart to watch over his comrades.

One of Darrell's romantic whims was a passion for adventures. He loved to fancy himself a knight-errant, and was always longing to meet some fair damsel in distress, whom he could rescue from a thousand perils, and who would finally reward him with her fair hand. He had never yet met with such an adventure, or with any thing approaching to it; but his unsatisfied longing would not be repressed. He still hoped, and was continually looking for some event to occur, in which he could act the knightly part that he had so often pictured out.

The forest-path which he had taken eventually brought him into the Sandpit road, not far from the place where the four scouts had settled their account with Chester Dingley. Darrell determined to ride on and see whether the Tory was still there.

"It was really an ungentlemanly action," said the cavalier to himself, "to leave him in such a situation, though the wretch undoubtedly deserved all he got. If he is still on the stump I will let him down, and will expect him to hate me forever after.

"He is there yet," thought the young gentleman, as he perceived the upright form of Chester Dingley under the tree. But a nearer view showed him that the Tory was swinging above the stump, instead of standing on it, and, as the face turned around toward the moon, the distorted features told

him that the man was long since dead. A still closer inspection proved that he had been drawn up from the stump, and that the rope had been fastened anew since the scouts left him.

"This is none of our work," said the cavalier, as he shuddered at the sickening sight. "But we are responsible for it. It is evident that the man had more enemies than friends, and we have given a chance to some sneaking assassin to murder him. Angels and ministers of grace defend us! who come here? An adventure at last, as I am a gentleman!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of two persons, who had just come into view, riding slowly down the road. They were a lady and a gentleman, as Darrell at once perceived, and he was sure, from the perfect form of the lady, and the grace with which she sat her horse, that she must be young and beautiful. What could she be doing, in that road, at that hour of the night? Was she flying from some peril behind her, or was the peril at her side? Had she been driven from her home by Tories, or was she being carried away, for some sinister purpose, by the man who accompanied her? Whichever of these suppositions might be true, the cavalier felt that his longed-for adventure had come at last—that his knightly sword and service were to be called into requisition in the cause of beauty and innocence.

The lady did not seem to be flying at all, but was proceeding very leisurely, and she stopped, with her companion, when they caught sight of Darrell standing in the road. The man made ready his pistols, as if to meet an enemy, and Darrell did the same, from force of habit. He then rode slowly forward to meet them.

As they approached, he perceived that they were both disguised, that the lady wore a visor over the upper part of her face, and that the gentleman's visage was almost entirely covered by a mask. Here was a new element of romance, which touched the young gentleman's susceptibilities, and caused him to feel emotions which he had hitherto experienced only in imagination. He saw, also, that the lady's mouth and chin were beautiful, and that her companion was very respectably dressed and apparently an old man.

"Good-evening, young sir," said the gentleman, in a deep

voice, that somehow sounded familiar to Darrell. "I observe that you wear the habiliments of war; but I hope that we are not, on that account, to meet you as an enemy."

"If you are friends to the cause of liberty, you can not be my enemies," replied the cavalier. "Neither could I, under any circumstances, be hostile to beauty and age, which are both so well represented before me."

"I carry my weapons, young gentleman, and I am able to use them. I would not fear to meet any one man. But you are right, if you suppose us to be friends to the cause of liberty."

"Have you been driven from your home? Has the young lady been threatened or insulted? If so, I am heartily at your service. You have but to point the way, and I will fly to revenge your wrongs."

"Your gallantry overcomes us. Your speech savors more of the chivalry of the olden time, than of these practical and revolutionary days. We have been molested, it is true, but are in no special stress at present, and are simply roaming abroad to-night for own pleasure. We are in search of a champion, however, and would gladly enlist you, if you are such as we believe you to be."

"You may trust me most fully. I beg you to tell me how I can serve you."

"I will explain—but what is that yonder?" continued the old gentleman, pointing to the suspended form of the Tory. "Who is that victim of forest law?"

"His name was Chester Dingley," replied Darrell.

The young lady uttered an exclamation of surprise and affright.

"How did this happen?" inquired her companion. "Did you have a hand in it, young sir?"

"I must confess that I had a hand in it, with three of my comrades; but we did not do all that was done. We captured him in the afternoon, and strung him up once with that rope, to persuade him to tell us what had become of a young lady for whom we were searching; but he either could not or would not inform us. We then left him standing upon the stump, with the rope around his neck, expecting that some passer-by would relieve him before long. It seems that some passer-by has been less merciful than we were."

"He doubtless deserved to die; but you are innocent of his fate."

"We did not intend his death, it is true; but we were the cause of it."

"Who were your comrades?"

"Sergeant Macdonald and Stairn, and private Gwian, of General Marion's scouting corps."

"Are they in the neighborhood?"

"They are not far from here."

"If you wish to perform a grand exploit, you have now an opportunity; but there is no time to lose. In front of Judge Alston's house is encamped a body of fifty British dragoons, under Major Stairn. They keep a poor watch, and you might surprise and rout them, if you should fall upon them just before dawn."

"There are but four of us, sir."

"Have you no friends in the neighborhood? More than one young man is now willing to take up arms, and there are several of Marion's soldiers visiting their families in the vicinity."

"True enough—if we only had time to get them together."

"Are you so slow and hesitating? A moment ago you were up in arms to do any daring deed that we might ask of you."

"But this is strictly a military enterprise, and it concerns my comrades."

"You have time enough, if you will use it well. It yet lacks two hours to midnight. You may not have another chance."

"It shall be done. But, if you will pardon me, sir, I must know who you are. My comrades will ask me from whom I received this information. They may fear that a stranger would lead them into some Tory trap."

"I had thought that you would have recognized me by my voice before this," replied the old gentleman, raising his mask and disclosing the well-known features of David Darrell.

"It is sufficient. But, the lady?" Darrell ventured to hint

"I am her guardian at present."

"Do you know what has become of Edith Alston, sir? Robert Stairn would give his right hand for news of her."

"She has disappeared, and those who wish to see her must find her. Robert Stairn should cure himself of unbelief before he hopes to meet her. Paradise was never open to unbelievers. He had better save his right hand for the service of his country. And you, Herbert Darrell, if you wish to do a daring and worthy deed, must give wings to your horse, and make the best use of your time while the night lasts. Farewell, sir. I would not delay you an instant."

Darfour bowed in a courtly manner, and his fair companion, turning her face toward the young gentleman, gave him such a sweet smile, that it put his blood in a fever and his head in a whirl. They then turned, and rode back up the road, while Darrell put spurs to his horse, and galloped in the opposite direction.

He soon reached the encampment of the scouts, and burst in upon his friends in such a style, without any previous warning, that they sprung to arms, supposing that the British or the Tories had attacked them.

When they had recovered from their surprise, he proceeded to relate his adventure, which he did in the most excited and incoherent manner, mixing up a beautiful and mysterious young lady with David Darfour, fifty British dragoons, Judge Alston, and their friends in the neighborhood, until his narrative was almost unintelligible. His friends at last succeeded in untangling it, and were all eager for the enterprise.

"We must do it if it is possible," said Macdonald, "and I believe that it is possible, if each does his best. We will have time enough to get together something like a force; but we must not let the grass grow under our horses' feet. Robbie Stairn, you go to the east, Billy Gwinn to the west, Darrell to the south, and I will take the north. We must rouse up our friends quickly, and meet at the big cypress at the head of Cole's swamp, at two o'clock in the morning, no later."

Without any further deliberation, the four scouts mounted their horses, and set out in the direction assigned to them.

The appointed hour found them all at the rendezvous, under the shade of a gigantic cypress tree, each with a small squad of men, hurriedly armed and equipped. A few of these were members of Marion's brigade on furlough; but the greater part were young farmers of the vicinity, who had

never been in battle. Including the four scouts, the force numbered twenty men, all told.

"We are few enough," said Macdonald, "to try to whip fifty British regulars; but the battle is not always to the strong. There is every thing in the surprise, my lads. Silence and caution must be the watchwords until we reach the camp, and then we must strike hard and home. Let us mount and set forward."

Silently and swiftly the little column hastened onward, and reached the open ground in front of Judge Alston's mansion, just as the faint streaks of coming dawn were beginning to tinge the eastern sky. Dividing his force into two parties, Macdonald led one of them around to the left, under cover of the woods. The other, under Robert Stairn, was to attack in front, and the two onsets were to be made simultaneously, upon the firing of a gun.

In ten minutes all was in readiness, and the sharp report of a rifle sounded on the left. Stairn charged up the avenue with his troop, and reached the camp just in time to see Macdonald fall upon the British, cutting and slashing furiously.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEAD AND ALIVE.

THE attack upon the British camp was not such a complete surprise as Macdonald had hoped it would be.

Major Stairn had been very wakeful and uneasy during the night. He had expected Dingley to return the previous evening, some time before sundown. As the sun set, and the Tory did not arrive, the officer waited supper for him until a late hour, and then was obliged to go to bed without him.

Although he laid down, he did not sleep; for he was kept awake by his own troubles and by the apprehension that some disaster had befallen Dingley. If his Tory friend had come to grief, it must have been by means of some armed band of the king's enemies that was lurking in the vicinity,

and that suspicion was enough to put the wary officer on his guard. He had no doubt that his force was amply sufficient to cope with any such band; but they might do harm if they should take him unawares.

Besides, the major was in a very unusual state of nervous agitation. He believed in all the phenomena of what is known among the Scotch as second sight, and he had seen, or imagined that he saw, the wraiths of his two children, dressed in their shrouds, and beckoning him to follow them. It seemed to him that there was death in the sky; the very air he breathed was heavy with it, and he could not shake off the gloomy feelings that hung upon him like a nightmare.

Unable to sleep, he went out and visited the guard, whose numbers he increased, and whom he directed to be more than usually vigilant, as he had cause to suspect that there were enemies in the vicinity. He then returned to his couch, where he moaned and tossed wakefully, until the crack of Macdonald's rifle brought him to his feet, as if he had himself been shot from the gun.

Rushing out of the cabin, he found his sentinels firing and running in, and his dragoons seizing their arms and hastily forming for the contest. He made his appearance upon the scene none too soon; for the patriot horsemen were already among them, shooting, hacking and hewing, and trampling down all that opposed them.

The voice of the major again rung out loud and clear, and his stern commands quickly brought his men into order, and enabled them to present a firm front to their assailants, who were now seen to be but few in number. The trained and steady courage of the dragoons soon turned the tide against the dash and daring of the swamp militia.

Disappointed of the surprise that they had hoped for, and dismayed by the unexpected resistance that was offered, the patriots were already wavering, and some of the recruits turned their horses to fly. Macdonald, Stairn and Darrell met in the midst of the *melee*.

"This will never do, comrades," said the Scotchman, as he wiped the blood from a cut in his forehead. "Our friends are getting ready to run, and we shall be badly whipped unless we can make a change in the fight."

"For my part," answered Stairn, "I am determined to win this fight, or die right here."

"As well here as anywhere," said Darrell. "I'm in to the death."

"Let me speak to them once," said Macdonald. "Don't give way before a few rascally red-coats, my boys! Strike hard for liberty, and the day is ours! Hark! do you hear that bugle? It is one of ours! It is Harry Alston's! Strike in together, my lads, or he will take all the glory from us!"

The clear notes of a bugle rose above the din of the combat, and were followed, first, by a rattling volley of musketry, and then by the charging gallop of horsemen. The four scouts and their followers, exhilarated by this unlooked-for assistance, rushed into the fight with renewed vigor, cut their way through the opposing dragoons, and mingled with their friends who came in the opposite direction.

The British, on the other hand, finding themselves suddenly attacked in the rear, were panic-stricken and ready to fly. Still the voice of Major Stairn could be heard, loud and clear above the din, exhorting his men to stand their ground, to fight bravely, and to sell their lives dearly. But all was in vain. Harry Alston, who had come, with a troop of horse, to put his parents forcibly in possession of their home, had arrived just at the right time and place, and his onset had been such that it could not be successfully opposed. Stubbornly the British dragoons fell back or fell dead, and there were but few to receive quarter when the fight was over, and the victors were inclined to be merciful.

Near the close of the engagement, Robert Stairn found himself engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with his British namesake, Major Stairn. Both were unhorsed, and their sabers were their only weapons. The Briton seemed only to parry the blows of the young American, his attention being given to another part of the field, and his voice being raised every now and then to encourage his men to stand out to the last.

Robert, indignant at being treated with such indifference, and anxious to stop that animating voice, fought more furiously, until his antagonist turned upon him, and compelled

him, by superior skill, to give back. The young man had been pressed back against a tree, and was in great danger, when the major suddenly started and dropped his sword.

"The wraiths! the wraiths!" he screamed, pressing the palms of both hands upon his eyes, as if to shut out some fearful apparition.

Robert was unable to hold back the thrust that he had given, and his sword entered the major's breast, stretching him on the ground.

"You have finished the leader, I see," said Macdonald, coming up to his young friend, as the latter was resting on his bloody saber. "I believe our work is done. Have you seen Darrell?"

"I saw him fall a while ago, but could not go to him. I will show you where he fell."

Under a tree near by they found Darrell. He was leaning on his arm, and his life-blood was rapidly welling from a pistol-wound in his chest.

"How goes it, cavalier?" asked Macdonald, kneeling by his side. "I hope you were not born to have the breath knocked out of you by a bullet. Are you badly off, my dear fellow?"

"Bad enough and well enough," feebly replied the young gentleman. "It is best as it is. I had nothing to live for. I should always have been a poor dog. Those six children would have outlasted me, and I would never have been Viscount Darlington."

With these words upon his lips, his gallant spirit passed away, leaving a record of many virtues, and but one fault.

Macdonald and Stairn, after closing the eyes of their comrade, turned sorrowfully away, and went to look after Gwinn and their other friends.

They found Harry Alston by the side of Major Stairn, who was insensible, though still breathing.

"Glad to see you, comrades," said the young officer. "You were a little ahead of me; but you might have been nowhere, if I had not come in time. As it is, we have done a good day's work."

"How did you happen to be here, captain?" asked Macdonald.

"I did not happen; I came with a purpose. I was sent here to look after this same lot of British dragoons, who were reported to be prowling about in the neighborhood. My mother, who was anxious to reach our home, learned that they were encamped on our grounds, and I came here to find them. Have you seen my sister? Do you know where she is?"

"No, sir; but I presume she is safe. Chester Dingley is dead, and I believe she escaped from him."

"You give me great relief; but we have no time now to speak of private affairs. We must attend to the wounded. This officer has had a severe sword-thrust, and the hurt is probably mortal; but we must carry him to the house and do what we can for him. Will you have the kindness, gentlemen, to see that our wounded men and the British are got together and taken to the house?"

The melancholy task was soon done. The hireling British soldiers and the free American patriots were laid side by side under shelter, where their wounds received the best attention that could then be given. Harry Alston threw open his father's house, and all its resources were freely supplied for the benefit of the wounded of both sides.

The body of Herbert Darrell was laid in one of the rooms of the mansion, by his three friends, preparatory to giving it a formal and Christian burial. Major Stairn, whose case seemed hopeless, was placed on a couch in the sitting-room, and Harry Alston himself dressed his wound and made him as comfortable as possible.

The young gentleman did not forget, in the course of his duties, to direct the servants of the house to prepare a substantial and plentiful breakfast for the patriot soldiers and their prisoners. While it was being made ready, he called in Stairn and Macdonald to assist him at the bedside of the dying British officer.

Major Stairn gradually revived under the effect of the stimulants that were given him, opened his eyes, and gazed wildly about the room.

"How do you feel, major?" asked Harry Alston.

"I am hurt to the death," was the feeble reply. "Who gave me that sword-thrust?"

"Robert Stairn, with whom you were fighting."

"Stairn! What Stairn? Where did he come from? How did he get that name? He had better change it. There is death in it. How goes the fight? Where are my men?"

"They are all killed or captured."

"And I shall not survive this defeat. Is not my wound mortal, doctor? But you are not a surgeon. No, you are that young gentleman, who escaped from me. Do you want to find your sister?"

"Yes. For God's sake tell me what has become of her."

"She was here, if this is the house. Yes; and I know this room; but where is the portrait of my sister's husband? Ah! it is in her room. The ghost has carried her off. She was locked in that room, and she disappeared."

"You are dying, sir," said Harry Alston. "Do you wish to send any message to your relatives?"

"Relatives! I have none. My two boys are dead, and I am the last of my race. I had hoped to build up a large fortune and a great name; but it is all over now. I have nothing to live for, and the spirit of my sister will haunt me to my grave. Ah! there she is now! Do you not see her? There they both are—my dead sister and her dead husband!"

Alston and his friends looked in the direction in which the dying officer pointed, and saw, standing in the shadow at the end of the room, two figures, an elderly lady and an old gentleman. They were Robert Stairn's mother and David Darfour—beings of flesh, and not spirits of air; but the wonder was, by what magic they had got into that room.

"They have come for me," gasped Major Stairn. "I have seen the wraiths of the two children, and now these have come to haunt me to the last."

"We have come to tell you that we live, Alexander," said David Darfour, stepping forward. "Let us look upon him, Margaret, before he breathes his last, and tell him that we forgive him."

As the two figures approached the dying man, he shuddered, and covered his face with his hands.

"This is death," he moaned, and his head fell back on the pillow. The next instant the rattle in his throat proved that he had spoken truly. Margaret Stairn knelt by his side, and, for a few moments, was overcome by emotion.

"What does this mean, mother?" asked Robert, when he raised Mrs. Stairn from the floor. "I do not understand it. Who was that dead man?"

"This is your father, my son," she replied, placing his hand in that of David Darfour. "Major Stairn was your uncle."

"And it was I who killed him!"

"It was fitting," said Darfour, "that the son should be made the instrument to revenge the wrongs of the mother. It is not your work, but the will of heaven. He has died as he should have wished to die, fighting bravely for his king."

The body of Major Stairn was removed into the room that was already occupied by that of Herbert Darrell. When the emotions caused by the scene had somewhat subsided, the party adjourned to the dining-room to breakfast, a meal of which only Macdonald and Gwinn partook with the relish of old campaigners.

When the table was cleared away, David Darfour, or Ronald Murdison, as he must now be called, was pressed for an explanation of circumstances of which all were ignorant except himself and his wife, and particularly of the mysteries connected with the haunted house.

CHAPTER XV.

EXPLANATIONS.

"THE time was," said the old gentleman, "when Ronald Murdison was young and handsome and rich. As for riches, I am not yet poor; but the days of youth and good looks have long since passed. When I married Margaret Stairn, it was considered a good match; for she was a beauty, and was heir, jointly with her brother Alexander, to a fine estate. Not only was it a good match in a worldly point of view; but we loved each other sincerely, and we married for love. On my part, my love was as deep and strong, I thought, as it was possible for human passion to be. It was like a devouring flame; it could not bear the thought of a rival.

"We ought to be happy, people said—we were so well matched. We would have been happy, under providence, had not Satan entered into our Eden when we had hardly begun to enjoy it. Our Satan was Alexander Stairn, my wife's brother, who lies dead in yonder room.

"Alexander's great fault—his besetting sin—was avarice. I do not like to speak ill of the dead, however much they may have injured me; but it is necessary that you should know this, in order that you may comprehend what I am about to relate. This fault was so great in him, that it amounted to a crime. His avarice not only led him into many mean and unworthy actions, but it even urged him to meditate crimes, if not actually to commit them.

"His avaricious desire to gain possession of his sister's property led him to set deliberately at work, with a premeditated plan, to separate me from my wife. If I had known that this was his object, I would gladly have given up to him every shilling that she owned, if he would have left us in peace; but I believed him to be disinterested, and was woefully deceived by him.

"He filled my ears with the vilest and meanest insinuations and reports, to which I will not advert here, except by saying that they were extremely prejudicial to my wife's honor. I was of a jealous disposition—I do not deny it—all who love deeply are prone to jealousy—and these slanderous tales found a lodgment in my heart. I do not propose to defend myself; but there is some palliation for me. Othello was driven wild by trifles and by appearances; but proofs were brought to me, proofs that I could not question. Besides, Alexander Stairn was my wife's brother. Was it to be supposed that he would even hint at any thing derogatory to her character, unless he was impelled by the most sacred motives of duty?

"It was thus that he first brought about an estrangement between my wife and myself, and finally a separation. I came to America, and sought to bury my sorrow in seclusion; but it would not stay buried. I still loved Margaret, although I could not live with her. I reflected upon the tissue of tales that had been laid before me, and concluded that there might be, after all, a possibility of her innocence. That

possibility I resolved to develop. I intended to bring her to America, away from her brother and all her old associations, and to try her here.

"With that view I built this house. I constructed it with a double wall, and with passages by which I could secretly gain access to every room in the house. I intended, when my wife should be lodged here, to be a spy upon her continually, until I could ascertain, beyond a doubt, whether my suspicions were true or false. It was an unworthy thought, and I do not attempt to defend it; but I was terribly jealous.

"I returned to Scotland to bring her to her new home; but she had fled. During my absence, her brother had revealed to her all my suspicions concerning her, and had even exaggerated them. Furthermore, he had told her that those suspicions originated only in my own jealous nature, and that he had vainly endeavored to combat them. I had gone to the New World, he said, to build a prison for her, in which I meant to bury her during the remainder of her life.

"Astounded at these developments, and fearing to meet me, Margaret took her infant child, and fled from her home. Her brother informed me that she had reached America, and had died there. Indeed, he showed me a letter to that effect. After settling up my affairs in Scotland, I returned to the Carolinas. On my arrival here, I caused it to be reported that I had died on the passage, as I wished to forget the world, and to be forgotten by it.

"Alexander Stairn quietly entered into possession of his sister's property, and it was not long before I was made acquainted, by a faithful friend in Scotland, with the full extent of his villainy—for he had so far forgotten himself as to boast of it. I took no steps to punish him, however, believing that it was better that the wrong should sleep quietly in the grave with my injured wife.

"It was not until after the commencement of the war that I discovered that Margaret was still living, and in this colony. I could not summon courage to face her, however, and did not see or speak to her until I met her in this house. Then she was about to fly, upon the approach of Major Stairn and his dragoons. I took charge of her, and since that time she has been safely housed here, although invisible. I believe

that she has forgiven me for my cruel suspicions, and I trust that we have both forgiven her brother."

"It is to you, then," said Harry Alston, "that we must look for an explanation of the manner in which the house became haunted."

"Certainly. I am responsible for it all, and I hope that I have used my ghostly power only for good. Exorcise me, and you lay all the demons. It was I who made the strange noises that were heard when you were arrested, and I put a sword through a crack in the wall, near the door, and cut the legs of two dragoons, as you may remember."

"I remember it well, sir."

"It was I who charged up the road that night, on a black horse, and frightened Major Stairn's party so badly, making them think that Marion with his whole brigade was at their heels."

"I am greatly indebted to you, sir, for my timely escape. I am afraid that it would have gone hard with me, if I had been taken to Georgetown."

"When the major returned to the house in a terrible passion," continued the old gentleman, "and when he was determined to burn down the building, in order to get rid of the ghosts, I was behind the wall of the sitting-room, stationed where my portrait was hanging, and I spoke to him in such a way as compelled him to desist from his purpose. I could not keep him from carrying off Edith; but I gave such information to our friends the scouts, as would have enabled them to rescue her, if he had not transferred her to Chester Dingley before he met them. When the major and Dingley brought her back here, it was easy enough to steal her from them."

"That is a subject that interests more than one of us," said Robert. "As you have hid her, sir, will you have the kindness to inform us where she is to be found?"

"Unbelief can never find her, my son," replied Mr. Murdison. "You can not see her, unless you use the eye of faith."

The eye of faith! There was a hidden meaning in that expression, and Robert was not long in divining it. At one end of the dining-room were three bas-reliefs, representing Faith, Hope, and Charity. After a moment's thought, the young man quickly stepped to the figure of Faith, and pressed

a finger upon one of the eyes. The figure moved, and an opening was disclosed in the wall, in which was seen the smiling face of Edith Alston, who stepped out, and threw herself into the arms of—her brother Harry.

"You have used faith, my son," said the old gentleman. "You must now use hope, and in time you may receive clarity."

"I have been listening to what you have told these gentlemen, Mr. Murdison," said Edith, when she had finished exchanging greetings with her friends; "but you have told them nothing of the ghostly revelings that have been held here during the past few days."

"Perhaps you had better tell it yourself," rejoined the old gentleman.

"They were trying to marry me to Chester Dingley," said Edith, "but, when my gentleman rose to perform his part in the ceremony, he discovered that he had been tied to his chair by this venerable ghost, who then sent a peal of laughter through the walls that was terribly ghostlike, I assure you. Frightened from their marriage project, they locked me up in my room; but my friendly ghost spoke to me at night, bidding me rise and dress myself. I did so, and found a door opened in the side of my room, through which I disappeared, very mysteriously I suppose. When they came up to search the room, and Major Stairn started to take down a portrait that was hanging there, who should stick his head through the picture, but Benjo, who was behind the wall with Mr. Murdison. They were soundly frightened, and vowed that the face looked exactly like that of a living Indian. But the worst fright of all took place in this very room. Major Stairn was nearly terrified to death."

"That was a serious matter, Edith," said Mr. Murdison. "The information that I then gave him was true. I had received a letter from Scotland, informing me of the death of his two sons, and I communicated that intelligence to him, through the ghostly medium. As Miss Edith says, it was a great shock to him. Let us now dismiss the subject of ghosts, with the hope that this house may never be troubled by any more malicious spirits than those that have lately haunted it. Young lady, I have no doubt that your brother's

wounded soldiers would be greatly benefited by a few of your bright smiles and pleasant words."

Our story is told, and it remains only to say a few words in parting.

Judge Alston and his wife soon returned to their home, and were astonished and gratified to witness the changes that had taken place, and to hear of the strange events that had happened during their absence.

Major Stairn and Herbert Darrell were buried in the family graveyard on the ground. Darrell's staghound was obliged to be coaxed away from his master's grave by Edith, to whom he then tendered his allegiance, and she cared for him until he died of old age.

A letter was found among Major Stairn's papers, written shortly before his death, confessing the wrong that he had done his sister and her husband, and praying their forgiveness. As he left no will, the bulk of his property went to his sister, as his next of kin. Among his effects was found the gold that he had received from Dingley. Thus the purchase-money, for which Edith Alston was bought and sold, ultimately became the property of her children, in right of their father, Robert Murdison.

For they were married, if you really *must* know it. Charleston was evacuated by the British in December, 1782, and Edith Alston and Robert Murdison celebrated the occasion by a very merry marriage, at which the parents of both were present.

Benjo kept his own counsel concerning the death of Dingley, and it was for a long time an unanswerable question in the Waccamaw district, who hanged Chester Dingley?

THE END.

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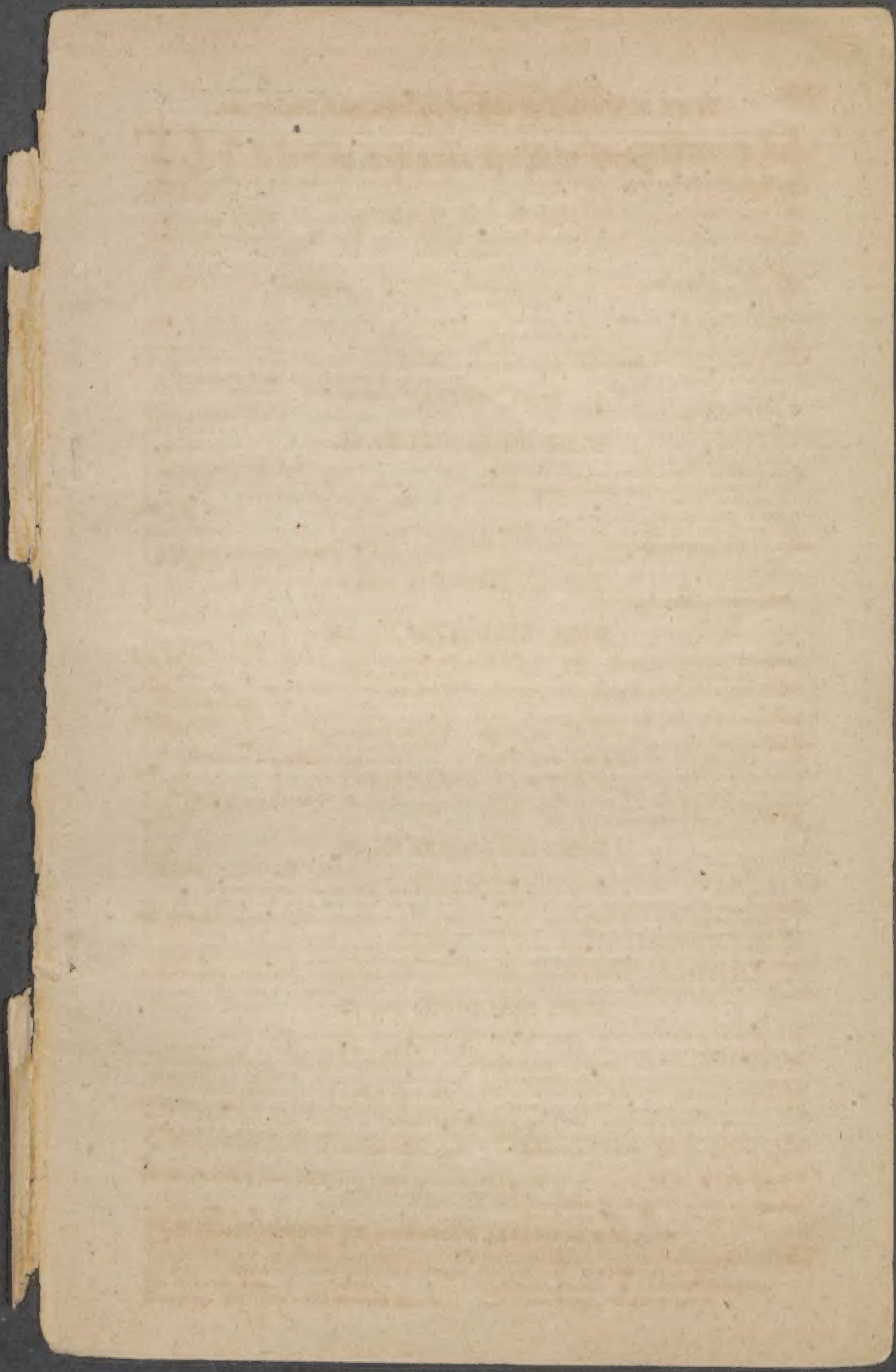
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 213 The Prairie Queen. By W. J. Hamilton. Ready August 22d.
 214 The Backwoodsmen. By Asa Beall. Ready September 5th.
 215 The Prisoner of La Vintresse. By Mrs. Mary A. Denison. Ready September 19th.
 216 Peleg Smith. By Boynton H. Belknap, M. D. Ready October 3d.
 217 The Witch of the Wallowah. By Edwin E. Ewing. Ready October 17th.
 218 The Prairie Pirates. By Gustave Aimard. Ready October 31st.
 219 The Hussar Captain. By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham. Ready November 14th.
 220 The Red Spy. By P. Hamilton Myers. Ready November 28th.
 221 Dick Darling. By Captain Frederick Whittaker. Ready December 12th.
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